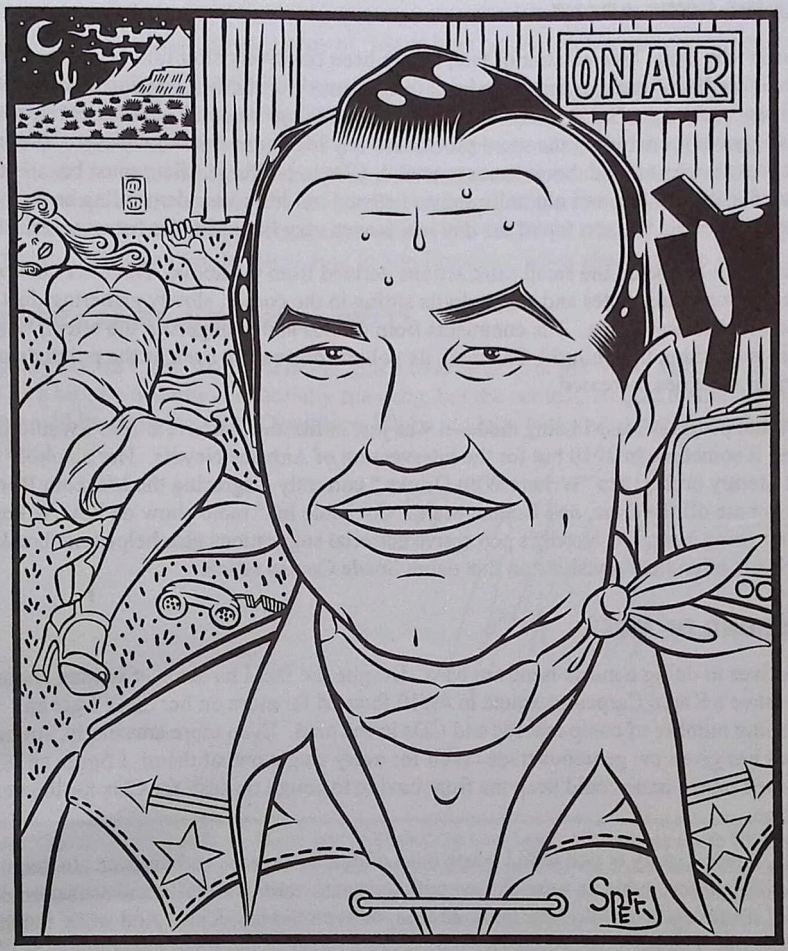
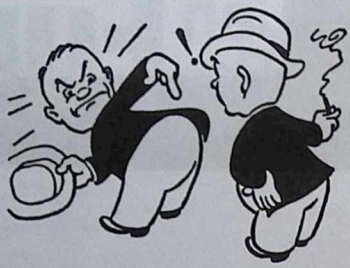
Murder C[redacted] Be Fun

#19 $2.00



Convicted Western Swing Star Spade Cooley

MUSICAL MAYHEM



JOHN MARR
[redacted]
San Francisco, CA 94164
johnmarr1@yahoo.com

WHILE WE WERE APART...

... I wasn't very busy. As a matter of fact, I have been positively slothful. I can cite the usual laundry list of excuses that have been dished out since the first fanzine editor was late with his second issue. But it really boils down to one thing: laziness. I have developed an absolute genius for avoiding the word processor. My life abounds with excuses. There are always more books to read, horse races to attend, CDs to purchase. Beer must be consumed, cats fondled, and old radio shows listened to. It's a very demanding and exhausting lifestyle that, on top of the day job, leaves very little time for actual work.

But alas, guilt tempered the small satisfactions derived from the above. There was the pile of research materials, notes and rough drafts sitting in the corner, slowly gathering dust as it stood in mute accusation. The comments from friends and strangers to the effect, "Are you still publishing that thing?" The mail, its volume decreasing even as the pointedness of subscriber inquiries increased.

It's not that progress wasn't being made--it was just in fits and starts. I'm sure I would have finished it sometime in 2010 but for the intervention of Annalee Newitz. Her alcohol-fueled literary orgies (aka "Writers With Drinks," currently disgracing the Makeout Room stage) got me off the dime, and Roman Mars's "Invisible Ink" radio show on KALW kept me from going back. Dr. Newitz's perceptive editorial suggestions also helped me break out of the cycle of endless revisions on that damn Spade Cooley article.

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

My motives in doing a music issue are base. Despite the fact I have never written about music (save a Karen Carpenter article in #9/10 focused far more on her diet), I get an astonishing number of comp records and CDs in the mail. Even more amazingly, Amoeba Records has given me generous trade credit for every single one of them! I figure an unabashed music issue could keep me from having to cough up cash for CDs for the next few years.

Luckily, music history is rich with bizarre tales of death, tragedy, and disaster. In keeping with *MCBF* policy, subjects were chosen with an eye towards obscurity and sensationalism. Damned if I was going to do Jim, Janis, & Jimi, or even Sid and Kurt. And while much music did die The Day The Music Died, it was otherwise an unremarkable dimestore plane crash. Forget Rhode Island; the only front page tragedy that tempted me was the 1979 "I'd walk over you to see The Who" show in Cincinnati. But space limitations intervened. Other casualties include a survey of on-stage deaths (everyone one from Spinner Philip Wynne to my favorite tenor saxophonist, Warne Marsh), lots of violent jazz-related deaths (far more stylish than their rock counterparts), a survey of non-Who related concert fatalities, and a bit on the one minor rock mishap I witnessed personally: the night a Misfits show in San Francisco ended prematurely after the bass player busted his bass over some kid's skull. Perhaps someday.

OFF THE COMP LIST

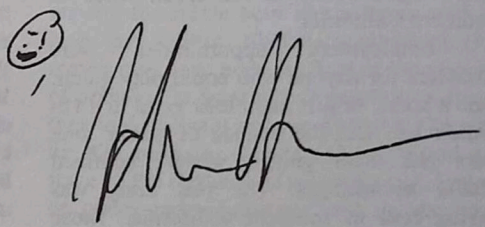
MCBF has already outlived several subscribers. But I've sadly had to prune the comp list for this issue.

First, all-around fun gal and long-time *MCBF* reader Sarah Jacobsen died last year in New York. The former queen of San Francisco's local film making scene and a relentless, yet completely unobnoxious self-promoter, she's best remembered for directing 1999's "Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore." This nifty little flick will make you realize the missing element from most underground movies isn't money or production values, but simple cinematic storytelling. Sarah had it in spades; no wonder Oprah snapped her up for her Oxygen network. Track down a copy of "Mary Jane" ASAP and I'm sure you'll agree.

Closer to home, Catherine Reuther died in Los Angeles shortly before press time. Catherine became my first printer after I fell out of a bus one night staggering under the weight of a box of self-service copied *MCBF* #8. Talk about cool printer. Not only did she offer cheap rates, quality service, and free delivery, she also was the first person to hip me to the wonders of the Museum of Jurrasic Technology. When she closed up shop, she hooked me up with the Happy Hungarian who prints *MCBF* to this day. She was a great friend who left a never-to-be filled void in San Francisco when she moved to Los Angeles.

MURDER CAN BE FUN...FOREVER???

Probably not, as I lack issue and heirs. But #20 is already in the works as I type this. It will be a bit of a departure, editorially speaking, but the content, subject matter, style, and format will be all in the *MCBF* tradition. It'll be out later than you expect, but sooner than you think.



Murder Can Be Fun® is written, edited, and published by John Marr. All contents are © 2004 by Mr. Marr, and may be reprinted only by conditional permission granted by the aforementioned copyright holder.. Further copies of this issue are available by sending the cover price to John Marr at the above address. A listing of in print back issues available upon request. Stores are invited to inquire about my very reasonable wholesale rates. It's cheaper to be a *MCBF* friendly store than you think!

Special kudos this time to the Doanes, who provided endless assistance and inspiration, especially with the Spade Cooley thing. Additional appreciation goes out to Kiki Gilderhus (even more Spade Cooley stuff!), Joel Selvin, JB (three of 'em), LP, MR, LJ, CR, and everyone who's had to listen to me babble about this stuff over the past five years.

cover art by Chuck Sperry

centerfold art by Michael McMahon

THE SPADE COOLEY STOMP

A Saga Far From the Sagebrush

"HOLLYWOOD HOE-DOWN"

For a few years during and after World War II, Hollywood, California was the unlikely capitol of country music. Thanks to the popularity of western movies in general and "Singing Cowboy" films in particular, Gower Gulch was lousy with practitioners of what was then called "hillbilly music." Everyone from guitar-strumming rednecks to seasoned Nashville session musicians had seemingly deserted the heartland to find, if not the promised land, at least steady work on Gene Autry and Roy Rogers oaters in the urban wilds of southern California.

Employment opportunities were excellent for anyone who could play guitar, ride a horse, or just plain look good in a 10-gallon hat. But the sounds of honky tonk bars and steel guitars weren't confined studio soundstages. The real thing was taking root in southern California. Those mobs of displaced Dust Bowl-displaced Okies and Arkies, so reviled during *The Grapes of Wrath* days of the 1930s, were the foundation. The formerly penniless fruit-pickers had found their niche on the shop floors of Southern California's booming defense industry. They were now flush with war-time cash and thirsty for down-home style entertainment. The nightclubs and ballrooms of the southland responded in kind. No western musician ever went hungry for lack of work during those wartime years.

One of the most popular styles was "western swing." Originating in Texas and Oklahoma during the '30s, it was the country analog of jazz, the sound of rural people going urban. Western swing slickly fused traditional rural music with a veritable urban musical smorgasbord. It incorporated everything from Hawaiian folk music and urban blues to sophisticated jazz-style rhythms, improvisation and arrangements as well as musical instruments alien to hillbilly string bands. Some, like steel guitars and trap drum kits, became integral parts of the country sound. Other, like accordions, harps and vibraphones (!) disappeared from country music after the genre's heyday. But despite the harps and other suspiciously long-hair musical elements, western swing was wild, frequently unruly, and could swing like hell--just like its intended audience. It was a perfect soundtrack for a night of drinking, dancing, and brawling.

Today, Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys (biggest hit: "San Antonio Rose") are remembered as the archetypal Western swing band. But back in the day, the far-less remembered and revered fiddler Donell "Spade" Cooley was the popular and commercial equal of the redoubtable Mr. Wills. The self-proclaimed "King of Western Swing," Cooley combined flashy showmanship and innovative music with a keen business sense to become one of the biggest names in mid-century western music.

Cooley was born in Grande, Oklahoma in 1910. Although he would always trumpet his Okie heritage and boast about 1/4 Cherokee, the Cooleys missed the Dust Bowl by more than a decade. The Cooleys left Oklahoma for Oregon in 1914, when Spade was only 4. They later relocated to Modesto, a distinctly unstoried city in California's Central Valley, when he was a teenager.

Growing up in Oregon, little Donell showed early musical talent and started cello and fiddle lessons at a tender age. He was good enough when he was 8 to sit in with his father, a professional fiddler himself, at square dances. Spade (a nickname he picked up after winning a few poker pots with

spade flushes) eventually dropped out of high school to become a professional musician. His first trip to Hollywood ended with nary a break, and he slinked back to Modesto in the early '30s. While refining his chops in San Joaquin Valley roadhouses, he married for the first time. A son John was born in 1933. Spade would later quietly divorce his first wife before he hit the real big time.

Spade Cooley and wife Ella Mae

In 1934 Spade set out again over the Grapevine in search of the elusive break. Three years later, it came. Someone spotted him hanging around in front of the Republic Pictures lot and noticed he looked a hell of a lot like singing cowboy star Roy Rogers. Almost overnight, the penniless fiddler found himself on a Hollywood set standing in for Rogers. Nor did it take long for Rogers and his handlers to discover Spade's other talents. Rogers formally launched Spade's musical career when he hired him to play fiddle in his touring band. Sessions, studio work, and a variety of increasingly high profile gigs--Spade was even in the Riders of the Purple Sage for a while--soon followed.

Spade's next big break came in 1942. He was playing fiddle for Jimmy Wakely, who had an extended gig at the new Venice Pier Ballroom. Accounts of who did what to whom are conflicting. But when the dust cleared, Wakely and the entire horn section were gone, leaving Spade with the gig and what would be the nucleus of his band. The Venice Pier Ballroom residency was the launching pad Spade used to make himself one of the biggest bandleaders in southern California.

The new band attracted a growing following in no small part due to the showmanship of their new leader. In addition to being an excellent musician and talented songwriter, Spade was a kinetic stage performer. He danced and jumped from one side of the stage to the other, waving his fiddle bow like a baton with a huge grin splitting his face at all times. His moves may have been the fruit of long hours of prancing in front of mirrors, but on-stage they looked lively and spontaneous. Nor did he stint on looks. Spade only appeared on stage in the flashiest of western wear, heavy on glitter and sequins and with no shortage of appliquéd fiddles, spades, and music notes. According to friend and fellow musician Hank Penny, "The was *nobody* dressed as sharp as him, not even Roy Rogers or Gene Autry. Cooley out-dressed them all."

And people ate it up. By the end of the band's 18-month residency at the Venice Pier, they were drawing upwards of 8,000 people a week. Spade capped off his Venice run with a week-long battle of the bands with his replacement, Bob Wills himself. The crowds voted for Spade. He used his victory to claim the billing he used for the rest of his career: "The King of Western Swing." The self-crowned king then rented the new Riverside Ranchero Ballroom

(which, contrary to its name, was on Riverside Drive in Los Angeles proper) for an even more lucrative long-term engagement.

Spade Cooley and his band began cropping up on the radio, in films, and ultimately on records. He recorded what would become his signature song at his first session in 1944: "Shame On You." Released the following year, it would be the biggest hit of his career. It spent 31 weeks on the country charts and was voted "Country Song of the Year" for 1945. His next five singles followed it into the top 10 of the country charts. He capped the year off by marrying Ella Mae Evans, a blonde singer/fiddler in his band, in December in Las Vegas. The Okie fiddler from Oregon had arrived.

In 1946, he leased the Santa Monica Ballroom to start a mega-successfull multi-year run. But his seemingly unstoppable career experienced its first real setback. His star vocalist Tex Williams signed a solo deal with Capitol. Ever the autocrat, Cooley fired him and took over the lead vocal duties himself. Williams retaliated by wooing away the core of Spade's band to form the Western Caravan. Most critics agree that musically, Spade would never recover. He never had another hit. Tex and the Western Caravan, meanwhile, would go on to score with songs like Capitol's first million-selling single "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)." But when it came to the bottom line, Spade had the last laugh. Even as crowds continued to pour into the Santa Monica Ballroom, Spade prepared to take his career to the next level.

In 1949, Spade went into the hot new medium: television. It started with "The Hoffman Hayride," a country music variety show sponsored by a local TV manufacturer. It featured Spade and his band broadcast live from the Santa Monica Ballroom. The humor was schmaltzy (it made "Hee Haw" look like Noel Coward) and the music watered down. Nonetheless, it was a massive local success. Eventually re-christened "The Spade Cooley Show" and relocated to a TV studio, it was one of the early mega-hits of Los Angeles television. In the early '50s, as much as 75% of the Saturday night television audience in Los Angeles tuned in to Spade. His guests included such heavies as Frank Sinatra, Jerry Lewis, and Sarah Vaughan. It was the top-rated show in Los Angeles in 1952 and 1953 and even won a few local Emmy awards. Comedian and singer Hank Penny, a show regular, remembered, "I could walk around Hollywood and man, I was a *star*!"

The TV show marked the apex of Spade's career. And then the decline set in. Western music in general, and Western Swing in particular, lost its grip on the pop charts and the popular imagination. Hollywood's "Singing Cowboys" hung up their guitars and rode off into the sunset, replaced by their less-musical (albeit more trigger happy) TV-brethren. Nashville recaptured the hearts and minds of the country music audience with Hank Williams' sparse honky-tonk sound. Urban kids were turning to rock 'n' roll while their parents gravitated towards jazz and easy listening. Western swing's ridiculously big bands and increasingly overdone arrangements sounded quaint, hackneyed, and comatose--and none so much as Spade's.

Spade wasn't taking it lying down. He frantically tinkered his band's line-up and sound. He left no gimmick unconsidered, no novelty untried: bigger bands, horn sections, string sections, pop arrangements, and even an all-girl line-up. At one point, his band featured a mind-boggling 25 pieces*. But none of it worked.

Not only was Spade losing his audience, he'd lost his path. His sound was far from the spirited country swing of his salad days. At best, it was half-baked big band jazz (an equally-endangered musical genre) played by guys in cowboy shirts; at worst, it reportedly skated dangerously close to Lawrence Welk's territory. Hit records by the Spade Cooley Band were but a memory. His stratospheric TV ratings were rapidly

---

* By comparison, a typical jazz big band only fields 15 or 16 pieces. Cooley's aggregation is apparently one of the biggest bands in the history of country music.

returning to earth. His last stab at holding on to the big time was to star in a few western movies himself. The results were reportedly one of the low points in a genre not noted for its high points.

Western Swing in general, and Spade Cooley in particular, was dead. The radio show was canceled. His last record company ended five hitless years by dropping him in 1955. But it was television that hurt the worst. Spade was getting pounded in the ratings by another local bandleader's show: the aforementioned Mr. Welk. The "Spade Cooley Show" left the air for good in 1956. A daily 15-minute show coupled with a Saturday night country & western show co-hosted with Tex Williams the following year would prove to be short-lived.

Spade retired from show business in 1957. It was not an unmixed blessing. Always a driving perfectionist on stage and in the studio, his fading career had exacted its toll on his health. He had suffered a few minor heart attacks and had a good start on a drinking problem. Retirement was a welcome freedom from the pressures of show business: the continual madness of putting together that perfect Saturday night show and all those frantic hours in the recording studio trying to come up with the ever-elusive hit record.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Spade could ride off into the Hollywood sunset in style. He had always been a sharp man with a dollar from the days when he cut out promoters and leased ballrooms himself. Over the years, he'd invested his profits wisely and well. He was now sitting on a nice portfolio of prime Southern California real estate and more than enough cash to see him and Ella Mae through their golden years in lavish style.

Especially prized was 80 acres he'd purchased in 1952 in the Tehachapi foothills near Willow Springs, 40 miles east of Bakersfield. The year after he retired, he began to build his dream ranch on the desert parcel and laying the groundwork for his next career.

No one noticed that one of the last songs he cut featured Betsy Gay singing a little number called "You Clobbered Me."

"OKLAHOMA STOMP"

By 1961, the 51-year old Spade was no longer King of any viable musical genre. But he was still Lord of his Manor, the manor in question being the sprawling ranch house he'd built on his Tehachapi foothills spread. The Cooley family had left their Encino mansion to become full-time residents of Spade's rural Xanadau. His living room overlooked a kidney-shaped swimming pool and commanded a stunning view of the majestic, austere wastes of the Mojave desert. Horses nickered gently in his barn; eight head of Black Angus cattle contentedly chewed cud in his fields. Far as he may have been from the roar of the crowd and the thrill of staggering royalty checks, Spade missed them not. He'd found a deeper, more profound calling. The classically trained violinist had gone agrarian. As he told a reporter, "I'd rather be a farmer than anything else in the world."

Well, not entirely. Spade wasn't just another has-been hayseed musician turned gentleman farmer fiddling with livestock. He was redirecting all the single-minded energy and ruthless ambition that had taken him to the top of the Hollywood heap into his second career: Donell Cooley, real estate magnate. Nor was he starting small. There would be no cheap speculations and ticky-tacky tracts for Spade Cooley. He had a vision, a vision of a desert in bloom. He was in the midst of a sprawling deal that would transform the sandy wastes surrounding his ranch into a lush recreational paradise complete with three artificial lakes, vacation homes, a theme park, and a ballroom featuring (who else?) the Spade Cooley Orchestra. "Water Wonderland Ranch" the proud developer christened it.

However, all was not well at the future location of the land of milk, honey, and no-limit bass fishing. Making the desert bloom was a snap; Spade had sheaves of drawings, blueprints and engineering reports showing just how to turn that trick. But darned if the 51-year old fiddler could master the art of making his 37-year old wife Ella Mae mind. Even as plans for a spectacular recreational oasis took shape in the hills outside the Cooley manor, bitter and violent matrimonial battles raged within. His 15-year marriage was dissolving into a quagmire of recriminations and violence both real and metaphysical. He filed for divorce from the woman he used to introduce on stage as "the purtiest little filly in California" on March 21, 1961. But as any family court veteran knows, this just signals the start of true hostilities.

The Cooley's marital troubles came to a climax on April 3, less than two weeks later. Melody Faith, the Cooley's 14-yr. old daughter, was staying with old family friends the McWhorters in nearby Rosamund that day. Around 6 o'clock in the evening, she received a telephone call from her mother. Ella Mae asked her to come out to the ranch for a few minutes. Spade also chimed in, grabbing the phone from his wife and asking Melody in disbelief, "You don't want to see this old rip, do you?"

Melody was stuck. Scared as she was of her father, she couldn't refuse her mother. Even if, as she later said, "I already knew what was going to happen." As Mrs. McWhorter drove her up to the ranch, Melody carefully arranged to be picked up in 20 minutes. Melody didn't want to spend one minute more at home than absolutely necessary.

Mrs. McWhorter dropped Melody off at 6:20. Hesitantly, the perky teen walked up to the house and climbed up onto the porch. She opened the front door and walked into the living room. She saw Spade sitting on the couch, talking on the phone. "Don't call the police, Beale. Don't call the police," he said before hanging up.

The man that rose from the couch to greet her--well, television viewers would

have never recognized him as their "Fiddling Friend Spade Cooley." He was sweaty and shirtless. His tan corduroy pants were splattered with blood, ominously complementing the enraged expression on his face. Before Melody could change her mind, he roughly grabbed her arm. Gruffly he said, "I want you to see your mother." Half pulling, half dragging, he hauled the reluctant teen into the combination master bedroom/den. Melody had come out to the ranch to see her mother. And she was going to see her--or else.

The bedroom was a cluttered, filthy mess. The floor was strewn with clothes, blank music scores, half-eaten hamburgers, apple cores, and popcorn. The bed was in furious disarray. The bedclothes were flung about and the sheets stained with blood to match Spade's pants. But there was no sign of Ella Mae. Only the sound of the shower running in the adjoining bathroom broke the silence.

Releasing Melody, Spade went into the bathroom shouting, "Melody is here--your daughter's here, come on out. Talk to her." His voice echoed hollowly off the walls. Ella Mae didn't answer.

There was the click of the shower door opening. A minute later, an enraged Spade emerged from the bathroom, dragging a soggy, supine and naked Ella Mae by her hair. He hauled her nude limp form into the middle of the room and disgustedly flung her down. Her head made a muted thump as her flaccid body hit the floor. She remained silent and motionless. Water slowly dripped off her steamy body onto the carpet. Spade looked down at her in obvious distaste.

Ella Mae's Sphinx-like silence meant one thing to him: she was giving him the silent treatment. He would not stand for it. He turned to his quivering daughter and said, "You're going to watch me kill her--because if you don't I'll kill all of us." Turning back to Ella Mae in a fury, he grabbed her by the hair and took a firm grip. Once--twice--three times he smashed her head against the floor in a futile effort to pound her out of her obstinate silence. When this failed, he turned to sterner methods. Twice, he stomped on her naked stomach with his black cowboy boots. All the while, he kept up a running, raging monologue criticizing her morals and manners, branding her a "slut" and worse. Ella Mae made no reply.

Melody stood transfixed in horror. Domestic violence was nothing new to her. Growing up in the Cooley household, she'd seen her share of one-sided marital battles. Spade liked to blow off steam after Saturday night shows by coming home and smacking Ella Mae around as Melody and her little brother cowered in the bedroom. Threats of matricide were a standard part of his post-show ritual as Spade berated Ella Mae for a supposed affair with his one-time mentor Roy Rogers. But it hadn't prepared her for this.

Spade soon realized that not only were his vigorous attempts to rouse his wife ineffective, but the phone was ringing. He turned to Melody and said sternly, "I'll give you three minutes more to get her off the floor--or I'm going to kill her." He then stomped into the living room to answer the phone and have a quick cigarette.

From the living room came the sound of Spade counting down the time. "Three minutes. Two and a half minutes..." Melody screamed at her mother, "Get up, mother. Get up!" She frantically splashed water on her face and rubbed her wrists. But her efforts to revive her drew no more response than her father's more violent methods had. Ella Mae continued to lie motionless on the floor. Only the horrible rattling sound of her breathing showed she was alive.

The three minutes were up. Much refreshed from his cigarette break, Spade walked back into the room, a rifle his hand. He stood in the doorway for a moment, a paternal chuckle on his lips as he watched his daughter's cute little efforts to resuscitate her mother. He then strode across the room and took matters back in hand. Pushing Melody aside, he told her, "We'll see if your mother's dead." He took the lit cigarette from his mouth and pressed it against Ella Mae's breast. Her flesh steamed and sizzled, but she didn't even flinch. Spade repeated

the cigarette test, but she still refused to stir.

That was it. Spade had had his fill of dealing with that stubborn woman. He turned away from her prostrate form. He said to Melody in the kindest tone he'd used since her arrival, "C'mon, let's leave her alone."

He took his daughter by the hand and led her into the living room. He sat down on the couch and pulled her down on his lap. Tenderly, he had her light him another cigarette. Then, he said in a throaty voice, "Kiss me, sweet." He held her close and muttered to her in a heartfelt way how he wanted to kiss her like no father should ever kiss his daughter.

At this point, it all became too much for Melody. She told her father she had to go, she saw Mrs. McWhorter driving up. She got up and dashed out the front door. Spade shouted, "Don't tell the police anything or I'll have to kill you!" As she sprinted down the driveway (Mrs. McWhorter was actually nowhere in sight), she thought she heard her father take a pot shot at her. Mrs. McWhorter picked up the distraught teen down the road a bit a few minutes later.

Mrs. McWhorter didn't find Melody's state especially alarming. She was an old friend of the family, after all. Whatever Melody managed to say between hysterical sobs didn't sound much worse than many an other evening at the Cooley ranch. She saw no reason to call the police. But just to be safe, she did telephone Spade's daughter-in-law, Dorothy Cooley, to let her know that something was up.

Dorothy drove out to the ranch around 7:00 to investigate. She immediately noticed that something wrong. The normally busy house was quiet and dark. She let herself in through the back door. She found Spade sitting alone in the living room, talking on the telephone. A rifle lay on the couch by his side. The furniture was in disarray. Broken glass was everywhere. Spade hung up the phone and greeted her. "Look at me, I'm a mess."

Dorothy was scared, especially when Spade refused to put the gun away. He launched into a rambling monologue about how much he'd loved his wife and how hard he'd tried to save the marriage, although he didn't say just where the other half of this marriage was. And Dorothy was afraid to ask. Faced with a gun wielding blood-stained babbling lunatic, she just wanted to leave as quickly as possible. She made her excuses and took off. As she walked hastily down to her car, Spade shouted to her "not to say anything" and that he trusted her.

Spade had apparently calmed down and changed his clothes by the time his business manager Barbara Bennett stopped by an hour later. (His bloodstained clothes were later found in the washing machine.) She later testified they talked business for an hour. She didn't notice anything amiss until Spade matter of factly asked her if she could check on Ella Mae in the next room. He was a little bit worried, he explained --she'd had a nasty fall in the shower earlier that evening.

Bennett went in the bedroom and was shocked at what she saw. Ella Mae was lying on the bed, bloody, battered and to all appearances dead. She turned to Spade and suggested that perhaps they should call an ambulance. He refused; he was sure Ella Mae would be O.K.. Finally, they compromised. Bennett called Dorothy David, a nurse and old friend of the Cooleys who'd worked for the family on and off for 13 years.

Unfortunately, David lived in North Hollywood. She didn't get out to the ranch until 11:00. She took one look at Ella Mae and was stunned. "Oh my god, what have you done?" she asked Spade in disbelief. Her diagnosis was immediate. Ella Mae wasn't breathing. She had no pulse, no heartbeat. Dorothy said, "I'm sorry, Spade. I believe she's dead."

Spade was absolutely astonished. Six or seven times, he said, "She can't be dead, Dorothy, don't tell me, she can't be." The rest of the night, he was the Compleat Distraught Husband. In the ambulance ride to the hospital, he starred at Ella Mae's corpse with an earnest, lovelorn expression on his face. Over and over he said, "I love

you, please don't be dead. She can't be dead."

The doctors took one look at Ella Mae's battered body, tagged her DOA and called the police. Spade remained the bereaved mate as they interrogated him. One deputy said, "He's all shook up... Maybe 'excited' is a better word for it. " Spade explained to them how his poor, distraught wife had recently developed the odd habit of jumping from moving cars. Why, she had done it twice just in the past week! It's no wonder she looked a little banged up. But it was a fall in the shower that killed her. He said, "She landed flat on her face and there was... uh...quite a crack. I believe the autopsy will show she died of a concussion." Him, Spade Cooley, hitting her? Absolutely not. He loved his wife. He'd never hit her.

After two hours of questioning, he admitted they had been arguing that afternoon. Maybe things had been a little heated. He might have slapped her once, twice, no more than three times--under extreme duress, you understand. She had driven him to it. But kill his wife? Why no, sir, he wouldn't dream of that. He loved his wife, he'd never do a thing to hurt her. It was an accident, a series of terrible, tragic accidents. The burns on her breast? Why, she'd done that to herself, burning herself with a cigarette and asking him, "Does this prove how much I love you?" His bruised and swollen hands didn't mean anything. He explained, "I hit things when I am hopelessly lost. I never hit people... I did everything in the world to save her. I prayed."

An autopsy on Ella Mae revealed she had been beaten, kicked, choked, burned with cigarettes, and sodomized with a foreign object. Two of her injuries were potentially fatal. A severe blow to her abdomen, perhaps a kick or stomp, had ruptured her aorta, and her thyroid had been crushed in a manner consistent with choking. Neither injury could have resulted from a spill in the shower or even repeated falls from a moving car. She had probably died in front of Melody, or soon afterwards. Spade was arrested and charged with first degree murder.

The scheduled April 16th concert by the Spade Cooley Band at the Kern County Fish and Game Barbecue was canceled.

"SHAME ON YOU"

On July 6th, 1961 a few days before the trial began, Spade was escorted from his cell at the Kern County Jail to visit the ranch for the first time since Ella Mae's death. The well-publicized trip was carefully orchestrated by his attorney, P. Basil Lambros. To the sizable media contingent accompanying them, Lambros said with a straight face, "There are a lot of blank spots in Spade's memory." He explained how he hoped revisiting the scene would help Spade remember what really happened that sad and tragic night.

Pathos was at maximum as reporters described the scene at the Cooley ranch. Spade's beloved homestead was in shambles. The pool was dirty. The landscaping was dying as the surrounding desert slowly reasserted its claim. Spade cut a meek, pathetic figure before this decrepit backdrop. Weakly he told the assembled press corps, "I can't speak. I'm not well." The image was of an ill, broken man who had been visited by a tragedy that cost him everything he loved. In his neat dark suit and quiet, sober tie, he was far cry from the monster the papers had gleefully described stomping on his wife's nude body in front of his teenage daughter.

Reporters were not allowed inside the house. But they were well-briefed by Lambros and the police as to the state of affairs inside. It too was a mess. The double whammy of a violent domestic homicide and an in-depth criminal investigation had all but turned Spade's beloved manor into a

disaster area. Debris covered the floors. Spade's prized violin collection was carelessly scattered about. One cop described Spade being overcome with emotion as he picked up one broken fiddle and held it as "tenderly as a man would hold a baby." Spade had to retreat to the bathroom to cry. The hard-boiled press corps was visibly moved. The *Bakersfield Californian* reporter wrote, "The sympathetic newsmen did not ask if it was the same bathroom Melody testified she had seen Cooley drag her mother's naked body out of the night she died."

While awaiting trial, Spade whiled away the hours in his cell by writing a few songs. Two caught the ear of his manager: "Faith," a hymn, and "Cold Gray Bars," a plaintive lament to Spade's late wife. She arranged to have another singer record them for release as a single. Spade told reporters, "Any other song on the record would be sacrilegious."

The trial began on July 9th. The fate of the tempestuous TV star was placed in the hands of a jury of 10 men and two women, all carefully quizzed about their feelings towards Indians and Okies. Spade entered pleas of not guilty and not guilty by reasons of insanity.

The outlook was bleak from the beginning for the dethroned King of Western Swing. The DA announced in his opening statement that he intended to prove Spade guilty of not just first degree murder, but "murder by torture," both mental and physical. The image of the humble man left broken by his wife's tragic death, so carefully built up in the pre-trial maneuvering, was quickly shattered by a long line of prosecution witnesses who had little good to say about Spade.

Over the coming days, a portrait of Spade emerged that was utterly divorced from the friendly, flashy fiddler who nimbly danced across stage and screen for so many years. The prosecution's character witnesses described Spade as a ranting, raving autocrat given to firing musicians in wholesale lots for the slightest miscue. He even once tried to throw one sub par girl singer off the Santa Monica Pier. Tales of a 1945 rape charge filed by another girl singer in the band (alleging an assault that took place less than a month before Spade's and Ella Mae's wedding!) were dredged up. Spade took it all in impassively. Outside the courtroom, he genially told reporters he was single, the girl singer in question was 20, and "I'll give you boys a story about Roy Rogers."

Early in the trial, the prosecution bussed the jury out to the ranch to see the bloodstained rugs and broken shower stall for themselves. The house was still a mess, but the caretaker had been at work on the grounds. Spade was visibly moved at the transformation. His voice choked with emotion, he told his employee, "God bless you Tom, you're bringing it back." The pool was clean, the debris cleared, the plants watered. Spade tenderly petted his prized Angus cattle, for a moment once again the rancher and master of his domain. He regaled the accompanying TV crew with tales of ranch life, only to break down in tears after telling them what a happy home it had been in "other days."

But even Spade's most genial reportorial back-slapping couldn't make up for the corpus delecti. Back in the courtroom, the prosecution introduced post-mortem photos of Ella Mae's nude bruised and battered body into evidence over the objections of Spade's attorneys. The violence-prone violinist's often repeated claims blaming her injuries on her habit of falling in showers and out of cars were quickly debunked by expert testimony so graphic that children were cleared from the courtroom. Horrifying as what Melody saw, what she hadn't seen was far worse.

Ella Mae had been beaten, stomped, strangled, burned with cigarettes, and sodomized anally and vaginally, apparently with a broom. Stains on the top six inches of the handle of a kitchen broom recovered from the ranch were consistent with the anal and vaginal lacerations suffered by Ella Mae. A UC Berkeley criminologist testified that the location and size of the bloodstains on the bed corresponded with "mutilation of

the designated areas." To complete this unappetizing picture of the sadistic swing musician in action, the prosecution added a pair of bloodstained men's shorts and broken jar of Vaseline found in the shower to the mountain of evidence piling up against Spade.

The last man outside the Cooley family to see Ella Mae alive was Chester Peterson, a Lancaster contractor who had been out at the ranch for a business meeting the day she died. He had arrived around 4:40 that afternoon. Spade was in rare form, extremely drunk and making irrational arguments. He "looked like a man on a drunk for a week," Peterson testified. His hands were noticeably bruised. As the meeting broke up, Spade invited him to go down to Los Angeles to watch him beat up some men "who were playing around with his family." Peterson politely declined. Ella Mae walked in shortly before the meeting broke up. She was dressed in a robe and appeared disheveled. She sported a black eye and "slopped over and kinda hobbled along," the contractor recalled.

And as if this wasn't bad enough, Melody then took the stand. The papers duly noted "the attractive youngster wore a light aqua white pin-stripe checked dress with puffed sleeves and with a white stripped handbag and ... white flats." Her crisp, wholesome appearance belied the horror of her testimony.

Melody's graphic testimony ranged far beyond those fateful 20 minutes in April. In between sobs and tears, the perky teen told stories dating back to her preschool days, when the soundtrack of her Saturday nights was furniture scraping, her mother screaming, and her father raving about Roy Rogers. The abnormally wholesome singing cowboy star was a perennial sore point in the Cooley household. When asked if there was a man whose name could not be mentioned nor his shows watched in the Cooley manse, Melody replied, "Yes, Roy Rogers, the poor man."

She described one typical tiff that happened several days before her mother's death. After the usual yelling and screaming, Spade kicked her mother in the back, kicked her in the stomach and then turned to his daughter and said, "Look, Melody, she only cries when you hit her."

Her older half-brother John stopped by the ranch to visit his Spade a few days later. After he left with Spade to go to a meeting, mother and daughter saw his unattended car as an avenue of escape. Unfortunately, Melody couldn't drive and by that time, Ella Mae was in no shape to do so.

Throughout her testimony, Melody invariably referred to her father as "Spade." She later explained, "I stopped calling him 'Daddy' when this happened. I disowned him." Under cross-examination she said, "I don't hate him. I hate the thing he did. I don't think I love him."

Disowned or not, Spade was still as proud of his daughter as only a father could be. During a court recess five minutes after watching his little girl do her darnedest to swear him into the gas chamber, Spade asked an investigator, "Wasn't she beautiful?" Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when he keeled over with a minor heart attack that briefly delayed the trial. When it resumed a few days later, Spade prophesied to reporters, "God only... know(s) what's going to happen when the whole story comes out."

Only one man could tell that whole story: Spade Cooley. He was the star witness for his own defense. Incredibly, his testimony managed to overshadow Melody's graphic description of her mother's death. Unfortunately, it was not for the good. Spade's "evidence" did little to further his cause. His testimony was rambling, incohesive, and frequently irrational. It proved little more than his paranoid, delusional state. At one point during his testimony, court had to be recessed because he was so heavily sedated he couldn't remember his own name. But it wasn't dull for a moment.

First, he discounted Melody's testimony completely. Spade solemnly told the court, "Some of the things Melody said were out and out lies, very vicious out and out lies." He admitted that his memory was a

little spotty on the details, but those hundreds of beatings Melody had attested to were all complete fabrications. He only remembered a half-dozen or so "tiffs" with his beloved Ella Mae in all the years of their marriage. Not a one could be remotely called a beating.

Spade blamed Melody's prevarication on a little incident last February. In a fit of devilish youthful high spirits, his beloved little girl had briefly ran away from home. When she came back, he reluctantly did as any loving father should. "I paddled my little daughter for the first time," he shamefacedly confessed to the court. He speculated her perjury was her childish way at getting back at him for doing his paternal duty. Melody had earlier testified that Spade used a hard piece of leather to "paddle" her. Marks from Spade's gentle but firm parenting style were still visible six months later.

As for his marital troubles, Spade said it all began nine years when, "A friend of mine, like my dearest brother..." lured Ella Mae to Texas for a brief and sordid adulterous affair. Courtroom objections kept the name of this cuckolder out of court records as surely as Spade's edict had banned his name from the Cooley home. But by now, everyone knew exactly who Spade meant. At his home, a puzzled Roy Rogers denied the charges. He told reporters, "It broke my heart. We were like brothers... I don't know whether it was professional jealousy or whether he was trying to get something on her or what it was. I never could figure it out."

This taste of forbidden fruit, Spade continued, left Ella Mae helpless to resist its allure. While she was hospitalized for a hysterectomy the previous year, Spade found evidence she had once more violated the sanctity of their marriage. This time, she was consorting with a man working with Spade on Water Wonderland. Spade wasted no time in dealing with this threat to his home. He drove to the man's trailer and angrily warned him to stay away from his wife, and confronted Ella Mae when she came home from the hospital.

In an attempt to salvage their marriage, they set out on a road trip that would serve as a sort of second honeymoon. Spade was fully prepared to forgive and forget. But the Cooleys' journey of reconciliation followed an itinerary every bit as confused as Spade's testimony. They first drove out to the desert for a bit of rock hunting. The star-crossed man and wife were "happy as a couple of kids," Spade recalled. He was so positive Ella Mae was once more his loving wife he had her call the other man that night from their motel. As Spade listened in on an extension, he was horrified to hear the man speaking to his beloved wife as if she were a servant or slave. It was only then, Spade solemnly told the hushed courtroom, that he began to suspect the truth. Ella Mae's "affair" had been far more than simple hanky-panky.

The real truth, Spade continued, began to come out the next night in a Thousand Oaks motel room. Ella Mae confessed she had given the man $600 because she loved him. The following day they drove to Cambria, a small town on the Pacific coast near Hearst Castle. They booked a room at a hotel on a cliff overlooking the ocean. Hand in hand, they walked to the brink. Looking down at the waves crashing on the rocks 300 feet below, they discussed flinging themselves to their deaths but decided not to. Back in the hotel room, Ella Mae had a change of heart and grabbed a handful of sleeping pills. Spade slapped them from her hands, took her into his arms, and tasted the sweet fruits of reconciliation. "It was like our first honeymoon," the accused wife-stomper told the courtroom.

Sadly, this bliss proved to be short-lived. Both the Cooley marital situation and Ella Mae's emotional state remained highly volatile. On the drive home, she tried to fling herself from the car, sobbing "I want to die." Spade barely caught her before she flew out to the pavement. Yes, between the pills, the cliffs, and the car doors, Ella would have died months ago if not for Spade's husbandly vigilance.

Spade claimed he didn't remember too much about the week after the trip. He

blamed his forgetfulness on all the Phenobarbital pills he'd been taking to keep calm during the trial. But the day of Ella Mae's death--he remembered most of that. He'd never forget it as long as he lived. Forget his lying minx of a daughter--it was time for the truth to be told.

He'd spent the fateful day in a succession of business meetings. When the last visitor left, Ella Mae commented that Spade looked hot and suggested he take off his shirt and boots. After he did, she finally began to tell the real truth about her affairs. Yes, there had been more than one man. She told Spade his name and tearfully added, "I'm not worth it, Spade. I could tell you some things and you'll know I'm not worth it. Call Melody and I'll tell you both some things."

Melody was duly summoned. But Ella Mae couldn't wait. She started to tell what Spade called "the most ghastly story I ever heard in my life." The affair began, she told her stunned husband, with "a meeting would make you never want me in this house."

The things she did at this meeting were so sordid that not even a man who stomped his wife to death in front of his 14-year old daughter could bear to repeat them. "She said he had her do other things to him," Spade said haltingly. His attorney asked him if these "things" were unnatural. Spade said yes. Under gentle questioning, he haltingly described how his beloved wife had been inducted into a "free love cult" devoted to promiscuity and perversion. The ten senior cult members were to each bring in 10 new members to make a "closed 100 people club" staging regular orgies in San Fernando Valley motel rooms.

Up until then, Spade testified, he assumed Ella Mae's strayings were "normal man and woman affairs." He was so overwhelmed by her confessions of wholesale adultery and casual perversion that he instinctively struck out, knocking her to the floor. Next thing he knew, Ella Mae was sitting on the bed smoking a cigarette. She took it from her mouth and burned herself on her chest before launching into a full scale description of a wild orgy in a Rosamund motel room that climaxed in something called "the bath of love" to mark her initiation into the love cult. "This is where I lost all sense of right and wrong," the broomstick-wielding land baron said. Sobbing, the self-pitying sodomite added, "I'm guilty of slapping her, I'm guilty of knocking her down, I'm guilty of being jealous."

This love cult business may sound to the cynical like a last minute lie concocted by an unstable, booze and barbiturate-befuddled mind facing the gas chamber. But Spade was utterly sincere. The love cult was every bit a real to him as his beloved Angus cattle and his faithless wife's affair with Roy Rogers. Evidence introduced at the trial showed he'd suspected its existence months before the murder. From "interrogations" of Ella Mae he'd extracted names, dates, places, and written confessions of her free-love hijinks. Undoubtedly with an eye towards divorce court and custody of Melody and little Donell Jr., he had hired a private detective to further document his wife's adventurous extra-marital sex life. Spade was sure he was getting the goods on his slut of a wife and her perverted sex cult friends.

Unfortunately, much of Spade's "evidence" had already been introduced and thoroughly ridiculed by the prosecution. The two medical technicians whom Spade accused of luring Ella Mae into the sex cult had already testified. Not only did they deny any affair, several observers implied they were too light in the loafers for this to be an issue. This didn't prevent them from being targeted by the temperamental former television star. Three weeks before the killing, Spade visited their trailer in Northridge. He punched one of the puzzled men in the chin and screamed at them to "get the hell out of the state" or he "would kill both of them." One described telephoned threats from the reputedly easy-going bandleader "to kick my teeth in and kill me." The other told about a letter signed by Ella Mae that had been shoved under their door. It informed him that she had made a full confession naming dates, times,

and places and said she'd suffered "complete humiliation" for her association "with a person of your caliber." Although the signature was Ella Mae's, the actual confession was written by someone else. (Guess who!)

Other prosecution witnesses attested to Spade's habit of producing dubious confessions extracted from Ella Mae. Apparently, it was well known in the circles the Cooleys moved in. One of Spade's Water Wonderland partners described a typical case. The agitated violinist had told him he knew Ella Mae had been conspiring with his wife to chisel money from the corporation. He produced a signed confession from Ella Mae to prove his charge. This man was no fool. He brushed aside Spade's accusation and told him about that confession, "I know how you got it."

And then there was Spade's private investigator who wound up testifying against his former employer. (Always a bad sign!) Most telling were tapes he played for the court of several phone conversations he'd had with Spade. On one, TV's favorite fiddler rages, "I've given you dates, names...everything, places. I'll give you the names of the people in the room. Four in a room. Two in a room. Two in two rooms. All this (deleted) I know!" On another, Ella Mae confesses in a flat monotone to things she "shouldn't have... [but] I'll love him [Spade] until the day I die" as the man who would stomp her to death weeps in the background. But try as he might, the investigator could find no evidence to back up Spade's "knowledge." Of the wild orgies Spade ranted about, those sordid scenarios from Sodom and Gomorra staged in Encino motel rooms featuring Ella Mae, he found no trace.

Apparently, Ella Mae had been guilty of nothing worse than planning a quick exit from life with Spade. The fearsome fiddler terrified her; a nurse testified how she went into hysterics when she heard Spade had stopped by the hospital to visit her after her hysterectomy. She locked herself in the bathroom and refused to come out until assured that Spade had left the building. She had contacted a lawyer on the QT. and slipped the two medical technicians a little money to fund her escape. She had even told her sister a few days before her death that she was in bad shape and to be prepared to pick her up on request from a third party.

The defense introduced a series of character witness. Spade's sister, employees of his TV show, and even a professional bear wrestler paraded across the witness stand. They described him as an upright, tenderhearted man, a vegetarian incapable of violence, a kindhearted employer always quick with tears and cash for a musician down on his luck. Why, when he went rabbit hunting, he couldn't bear to administer the coup de grace to wounded rabbits. His hunting companions had to whip out their knives to put the little bunnies out of their agony.

Each witness swore to the beauty of the Cooley marriage. Not one uttered as much as a discouraging word about the Cooleys. One remembered touchingly how Ella Mae would "blacken the thin spots on Cooley's head so he wouldn't look too bad on television." But then, none of them ever knew just what went on behind closed doors.

The prosecution summed up its case with the DA telling the jury, "Mr. Cooley is not normal, he is abnormal.... the love cult is out of a magazine... It's one thing to kill your wife in a vicious and sadistic way and another to do it in front of your 14-year old daughter." The jury took a little more than 19 hours to find Spade guilty of murder in the first degree. As he left the courtroom, reporters asked Spade what he thought of the verdict. "Not much," he replied.

The sanity hearing began the following Monday. In a surprise move made over his attorney's objections, Spade dropped his insanity plea, waived jury sentencing, and put his fate in the hands of the judge. He later told reporters, "It was my decision and mine alone." No deals had been cut with the prosecution.

The judge quickly sentenced Spade to life in prison. He greeted his sentence with apparent relief. Once more, he became the

genial Spade Cooley of radio and TV fame. He shook hands with the male jurors, pecked the woman jurors on the cheek, and even shook hands with the judge and the DA. He seemed almost anxious to get to prison.

"COLD GRAY BARS"

Spade vanished from the public eye after the trial. Thanks to his heart condition, he avoided hard time with his fellow murderers at such noted California institutions as Folsom and San Quentin. Spade was sent to serve his sentence at the California State Prison Medical Facility at Vacaville.

Behind these not-so-cold gray bars, Spade Cooley reinvented himself. The fiddler/TV-star/real estate baron now had a new role: model prisoner. Freed from the demands of dispensing domestic discipline, Spade flowered as an ideal inmate. Humble and repentant, well behaved and industrious, probably sincere--that was the new Spade Cooley.

He dedicated himself to the betterment of others. Putting his training as a classical violinist to good use, he established a musical education program at Vacaville. He soon formed his fellow inmates into a credible prison band. In his spare time, he taught himself classical guitar and built an electric violin, no doubt to while away hours in his cell playing switched on Western swing.

The convicted wife killer was popular with both staff and inmates. He was especially close to Dan Lucchesi, a guard who was attending law school at night. "Cooley was very, very sincere," Lucchesi remembered. "When you get to know a man in prison, you get to know his qualities." Apparently the admiration was mutual. After Lucchesi passed the bar and started practicing law, Spade was one of his first clients.

This reformation was not lost on the parole board. Spade's first request for parole was denied. But the second time proved to be the charm. In August of 1969, taking into account his exemplary prison record, fragile health, and dim matrimonial prospects, they voted unanimously to grant parole to the excitable 58-year old fiddler. Spade's release was scheduled for February, 1970. He would have spent a little less than nine years behind bars. Most observers commented it was a pretty short sentence for a first degree murder, especially considering the crime's baroque embellishments.

But Spade didn't have to wait until February to taste the sweet fruit of freedom. To help ease his transition back into society, he was granted a 72-hour work furlough a few months later to allow him to play his first real gig in almost a decade. Could this be the first step in the comeback of Spade Cooley?

"I GUESS I'VE BEEN DREAMING AGAIN"

Cut to the rococo interior of the Oakland Auditorium (now known as the Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center) in downtown Oakland. The date is November 23, 1969. Just a few miles up the street in Berkeley, draft cards are being burned, marijuana smoked, and the works of Ho Chi Minh devoured by the long-haired harbingers of a new age. Nixon was president. It was the year of People's Park, Woodstock and Altamont, the moon landing and the Manson murders.

But in this little corner of Oakland, it

may as well have been 1952 again. The Oakland Auditorium was hosting a Grand Ol' Opry benefit for the Alameda County Deputy Sheriffs Association. A 2,800-strong crowd, heavily salted with law enforcement types and other short-haired members of Nixon's "Silent Majority" were hootin' and hollering through a succession of rural-oriented acts celebrating a different sort of American life. And high on the bill was none other than a temporarily unincarcerated Spade Cooley.

ACDSA President Sgt. Gene Saper said, "Spade was taken by the idea that someone would still want to hear him on stage. He didn't think he would be accepted." It seemed an audience unlikely to be receptive to the musical stylings of a notorious killer. But whatever his doubts, Spade was doing his darnedest to be up for the gig. He hopefully told a TV reporter before the show, "I think it's going to work out for me; I have a feeling that today is the first day of the rest of my life."

Spade's misgivings evaporated the instant he set foot on stage. He was welcomed like a prodigal son. The deputy sheriffs shook the building with a thunderous roar as the balding wife-beater took the stage for his first gig in nine years, and hooted and hollered through the fiddling felon's 20-minute set. Spade and his band swung their way through such old classics as "San Antonio Rose" and debuted a prison-penned number, "It's Time To Live, It's Time To Die" and no doubt ended with the inevitable "Shame on You." The not-quite-paroled killer left the stage to a standing ovation.

Back stage, a victory party awaited the almost ex-con. A crowd of well-wishers, autograph seekers, and friends and relatives were on hand to greet their conquering hero. (If Melody was there, the newspapers didn't mention it). Happier than he'd been in years, Spade drank it up and let it wash over him. It was like 1952 all over again. Once more, Spade Cooley was a star.

But Spade was far from the man he'd been in 1952. A few minutes after he came off, he pulled Dan Luchessi aside and whispered, "I had a slight seizure out there." He explained sharp pains began shooting through his chest during the final standing ovation. The lawyer shepherded Spade to a nearby chair. He sat down--and a few minutes later, slumped forward and fell to the floor. Not even the prompt administration of oxygen--the backstage was stocked with canisters for just this eventuality--could bring him back. Spade Cooley was dead as Western Swing.

The show went on. Spade, a trouper to the end, would have wanted it that way. It turned into a wake. Singers Roy Drusky and David Houston, actor Chili Wills, and boxer Archie Moore all paid impromptu tributes to the fallen fiddler, and the crowd hooted and hollered their respects. Spade's comeback may not have gotten past the first gig. But he died lauded by lawmen with the sound of their standing ovation still ringing in his ears. It was a fitting end for the for the man who had been for 20 minutes once more the King of Western Swing.

****

Humble authorial note: The description of the killing is reconstructed from the *Bakersfield Californian's* and the *Los Angeles Times's* coverage of the investigation and trial. Melody's various accounts (initial statements to police, inquest testimony, trial testimony) differ significantly on the details--how many times did Spade leave the room? Did he stomp Ella Mae before or after he burned her with cigarettes? Two or three phone calls? It wasn't surprising; she wasn't exactly taking notes. Or, as she told Spade's lawyer when he challenged her on inconsistencies, "They had just told me my mother had died. Am I supposed to get everything straight?"

****

AN ILL-INFORMED, INACCURATE AND INCOMPLETE GUIDE TO SPADE COOLEY on CD

Spade Cooley may have won the battle of the bands, but in posterity he lost the war. When writers turn their pens to Western Swing, the formidable shadow of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys looms large over their tomes, while Spade merits little more than a few footnotes. His music today seems to be prized today more for the work of sidemen like vocalist Tex Williams, guitarist "Smokie Okie" Rogers, and steel guitarists Speedy West and Joaquin Murphey than for the man running the show. It's a sad fate for a man responsible for much innovation in the genre, including apparently coining the term "Western Swing."

However, thanks to the healthy "let's reissue everything on CD" business model, probably more of Spade's music is available today than at any time since his death. Most CDs concentrate on his pre-1948 work, with a compilation of his Columbia/Okeh singles supplemented nicely by discs collecting rare radio transcriptions, air checks, and live recordings. His post 1948 work is much harder to come by. I haven't heard any of the music he recorded for RCA/Victor and Decca. But judging from air checks and transcriptions from this period, there are some good reasons for this.

The obvious starting point for Spade Cooley neophytes is **SPADELLA! The Essential Spade Cooley (Legacy/Columbia):** This collects the best of Spade's studio work for Columbia and Okeh at the beginning of his career between 1944 and 1946. The emphasis is on Tex Williams's vocals like Spade's inaugural #1 hit "Shame on You" and other classics like "You Can't Break My Heart" and "Troubled Over You." However, all but the best vocal numbers pale next to great instrumentals like "Swingin' the Devil's Dream," "Oklahoma Stomp" and the amazing Arabian-influenced "Spadella." The impressive music is nicely complemented by excellent liner notes. Essential.

Arguably even better (at least musically) is **SHAME ON YOU! (Bloodshot)** which compiles 22 radio transcriptions (studio recordings intended for radio broadcast only) Spade made for Standard Transcription Services concurrently with the Okeh/Columbia sides. Spade himself introduces the disc, cheerily saying in his humble down home voice, "Hello folks, this is your fiddlin' friend Spade Cooley." The music that follows is consistently livelier and jazzier than the commercial releases. It's probably closer to the band's live sound that packed 'em in at the pier. Although Tex sings on several cuts, most of the numbers are instrumentals. There's plenty of sizzling fiddle work by Spade and no shortage of great electric and slide guitar solos. Highly recommended.

A much more mixed bag of radio transcriptions is **SPADE COOLEY: 1941-1947 (Interstate Country Routes).** A dozen 1941 transcriptions Spade and Tex made as sidemen with Cal Shrum are added to nine more Standard transcriptions from Spade's classic 1945-46 line-up and a dozen numbers from Spade's 1947 post-Tex Williams band. The Cal Shrum cuts are decent stuff, with both Tex and Spade showing promise. The Standard transcriptions are excellent, especially "Three Way Boogie" and a hot "Spadella." They nicely supplement the Bloodshot disc.

The 1947 cuts are another matter. The band could still swing nicely on instrumentals like "Boggs Boogie" and "Hollywood Hoe-down." But when Spade's post-Tex singers take the mike, it's time to hit the skip button. It's not that they're bad singers--it's the awful songs Spade forced them to sing, embarrassing novelty numbers like "Leather Britches" and "If Only I'd See'd You." Ye hah. You wonder how many singers went flying off the pier before Spade found some willing to vocalize this drivel.

You can get a taste of what those post-war Hollywood barn dances were like from **SPADE COOLEY AND THE WESTERN DANCE GANG: Radio Broadcasts 1945 (Interstate Country Routes).** This collects material from several of Spade's live broadcasts from the Riverside Ranchero ("just a hop and a skip from home," the announcer points out) in 1945. It's easy to picture couples dancing slowly and gazing limpidly into each other's eyes as Tex croons "Forgive Me One More Time" only to spin apart, hooting and hollering as they frantically jig to "Steel Guitar Rag."(It's helped by the fact you can hear the hooting and hollering part.) There's also plenty of variety here, as Spade supplements his usual band with girl singers, a vocal trio, a banjo, and even a vibraphone! Although the recording quality isn't the best, the music is consistently good and blessedly free of novelties. The disc ends with Spade telling the listeners out in radioland, "If you weren't here tonight, shame, shame on you" as his band swings into an instrumental of his theme. You tell 'em, Spade.

A WESTERN SWING DATE WITH SPADE AND TEX (Jasmine) is one of those cheap-o CDs that skimp on little things like liner notes and discography so you don't know what the hell you're listening to. As near as I can figure, five of the cuts are from Tex Williams's post-Spade band, the Western Caravan, with the rest from Spade Cooley, split between Tex and post-Tex eras. The early Spade cuts are fine, many sounding suspiciously identical to tracks on the above CDs. Tex's Western Caravan numbers are also decent; even the flute (clarinet?) works. The later Cooley stuff, though, does not. Cooley's early experiments with horns and woodwinds were much less successful. They take the bounce out of classic songs like "Crazy 'cos I Love You" and only add to the schmaltz of piffle like "Piggy Bank Polka."

KING OF WESTERN SWING (Collector's Choice Music) is a transcription of the July 21, 1951 debut of Spade's radio show. After a full-blown dance orchestra opens the show with "Shame, Shame on You," a ray of hope shines as Spade and the fiddle section swing into a sizzling "Bile That Cabbage Down." But the horns join in after a few choruses and drag the spirited hoe-down down into a musical bog. And then things go straight down the toilet courtesy of an exercise in vocal humiliation entitled "Hitsitty Hotsitty." While the rest of the music never rises above mediocre, it does provide welcome relief from the allegedly comedic stylings of Hank Penny and "Lotta Chatter" (saxophonist Wally Ruth in drag.) It's not too hard to understand why Spade was canceled and Lawrence Welk went national.

SPADE COOLEY BIG BAND 1950-1952 (Interstate Harlequin) collects 19 radio

transcriptions from Spade's early '50s big band. "Bach Boogie," "Texas Playboy Rag" and "First of January" are the only real western swing numbers; the rest are pretty much standard big band stuff spiced with an occasional dollop of western-tinged electric guitar or steel guitar. Crap from the stupid first radio show described above fills out the disc. The big band transcriptions aren't especially bad. They're just not any better, and probably far worse than any big band worthy of re-issue. And considering that Spade fielded this line-up when even the great big bands were folding right and left, it's easy to see this as Spade's unwitting coda to his musical career.

Unheard, but intriguing is **SWINGIN' THE DEVIL'S DREAM (Proper Records).** This bargain priced 2-CD compilation includes a half dozen of the Cal Shrum cuts, the entire contents of the **Spadella!** disc plus 25 post-Tex Williams tracks Spade recorded for Decca and Columbia. Unfortunately, I didn't find out about this one until I owned entirely too much Spade Cooley.

Also of interest is **Big Sandy and His Fly-Rite Boys' NIGHT TIDE (Hightone Records)**. Although the music here isn't strictly Western Swing--Big Sandy & Co. have been melding retro styles for too many years for any such back-from-the-dead revivalism, the spirit of Spade permeates the CD. Moody photos of Sandy & the boys on Spade's old Santa Monica Pier stomping grounds decorate the booklet. Several songs touch on the theme of alcohol-fueled domestic violence, and one, "When Sleep Won't Come (Blues For Spade)" is told through the eyes of Spade himself, tossing sleeplessly in his cell in the Kern County jail as he ponders the magnitude of his misdeeds. Excellent stuff.

And for those who want to sample more of the good old stuff, Proper Records have three excellent 4-CD Western Swing box sets that are nicely priced indeed. **DOUGHBOYS, PLAYBOYS, & COWBOYS** is an excellent compilation of dozens of the stars and lesser lights from Western Swing's beginnings through the glory years. **Milton Brown's DADDY OF WESTERN SWING** includes just about everything recorded by one of the genre's seminal figures. And **Bob Will and His Texas Playboys' TAKE ME BACK TO TULSA** collects 100 pre-1952 cuts from the other King. Be forewarned, though--this stuff is addicting.

Unfortunately, **SPADE COOLEY-- OKLAHOMA STOMP: An Irreverent and Ironic Compilation (????)** is one CD that doesn't yet exist. But it should. All the above CDs are united by a sense of musical seriousness and sincerity. The music is apparently selected using conventional criteria: quality, availability, historical importance, and happenstance. The packaging is sedate, the liner notes respectful. Spade's post-1957 activities are discussed discreetly, if not ignored entirely. One could easily mistake the recording artist for some singing parson.

No, the field is wide-open for a CD that unabashedly approaches Spade's legacy from another angle--the dark one. Spade's discography and biography beg for an irreverent, ironic approach that is unashamed of the only thing most people remember Spade for anyway.

Including instrumentals like "Oklahoma Stomp" and "Swingin' the Devil's Dream" is a no-brainer. But not all the irony need be so cheap. Cooley's lyrical legacy is so rich with unwitting foreshadowing, it's a wonder the prosecution didn't introduce key records into evidence at the trial. The lyrics of many of Spade's songs are in retrospect almost autobiographical.

Although Spade apparently never wrote an unabashed murder ballad on par with Wynn Stewart's "I'm Gonna Kill You," most of his lyrical protagonists are just a hop, skip and a jump away from a well-deserved trip to the gas chamber. A favorite subject, nay, obsession of Cooley's pen is a self-pitying lovelorn man lamenting some faithless, two-timing woman. Heck, it would be easy to make a western swing opera out of this--Spade's already written most of the songs. His soliloquy would be "Troubled Over You." He'd sing "Hide Your Face"

to Ella Mae that final afternoon at the ranch, segueing into "Shame On You" during the climactic murder sequence. But the showstopper would be when he explains himself on the witness stand with an impassioned rendition of "Crazy 'Cos I Love You" with the pronouns suitably modified.

Connoisseurs of the "It's so bad..." school of ironic musical appreciation may feel slighted by the above selections, all of which are quite good. However, judging from the aghast reactions of people who've heard it, there seems to be no shortage of camp and corn in Spade's post-1947 work. The 25-piece band with a full string section--his all girl line-up--the stuff he wrote to compete with Lawrence Welk--surely somewhere in this unpromising discography of dreck lurks Spade Cooley's "Yummy Yummy."

And then there's simply the music that must be heard. After reading Spade's story, who doesn't want to hear Betsy Gay singing "You Clobbered Me", or "Cold Gray Bars" and "Faith", the two songs he wrote while awaiting trial? Label owners, take note. This is a CD essential for everyone from hardcore Western Swing buffs to irreverent urban ironists.

Cowboy Curses #1--Patsy Cline

It all started with a 1963 Kansas City car crash that killed country disc jockey "Cactus" Jack Call. Before you could say "Bad idea" a concert was organized to benefit his widow & orphans The bill featured a whole raft of Grand Ol' Opry stars, topped by reigning Country Music Association "Entertainer of the Year" Patsy Cline. For all the star power, the benefit flopped financially. Only $3,000 was raised for the grieving widow and orphans. But the downside went far beyond the disappointing gate.

After the show, Cline left for Nashville on a private plane piloted by her manager Randy Hughes. Also on board were "Cowboy" Copas, Hughes's father-in-law and an Opry star in his own right, and Hawkshaw Hawkins, another Opry performer whose new single, "Lonesome 7-7203" was soon destined to top the country charts.

The small plane was caught in a storm and went down near Camden, Tennessee. The impact destroyed the craft and killed the four occupants instantly; the bodies were shredded beyond all recognition. Coroners had to rummage through wallets too identify the three dead men.

Also on the bill of that ill-starred benefit was Jack Anglin, half of the duo "Johnny & Jack" that had launched Kitty Welles. No fool, he lived see Nashville by taking a chartered plane back. But death would not be cheated. On his way to Patsy Cline's memorial two days later, he lost control of his car and plunged down an embankment. He was DOA at the hospital, the fourth musician to die.

And still the bodies continued to pile up. One of the pallbearers at Anglin's funeral was country singer Jim Reeves, who'd racked up 46 country top 10 hits in the '50s and early '60s. Yet even his two degrees of separation from the fateful benefit was enough to seal his fate. Less than 18 months later while flying with his pianist, he crashed his plane near the Nashville airport. Both men were killed, bringing the toll of the far-reaching curse of Cowboy Copas to six musicians.

Great Rock 'n' Roll Deaths #1: Joe Meek

In this country, independent record producer Joe Meek is probably best known as the knob twiddler and songwriter behind "Telstar," the Tornadoes' insanely catchy international #1 1962 instrumental. "Telstar" was his only real stateside hit (heck, it was the first British record to top the US charts). But in pre-Beatles London, Meek was quite successful--for a while. He produced a string of hits for such acts as Johnny Leyton and the Honeycombs as well as recording early efforts by Tom Jones, Ritchie Blackmore, and everyone's favorite late lamented pioneer of long hair, Screaming Lord Sutch. Technically innovative, he pioneered overdubbing and multi-tracking. His records had an unmistakable sound that was as long on ingenuity and sound engineering know-how as it was short on capital outlay. Just run his name by your local garage rock geek for a full length rave.

Unfortunately, by 1967 mainstream pop music was rapidly passing the 37-year old former wunderkind by. The effects and sound that once could only come out of his cramped London apartment/studio at 304 Holloway Road could now be easily replicated in any of the modern studios. His allegiance to '50s rock 'n' roll (he idolized Buddy Holly) was increasingly at odds with the public's growing appetite for shaggier-haired, blues-based rock styles. Record labels weren't interested in releasing his records. His income was plummeting. Even his "Telstar" royalties were tied up by an ugly plagiarism suit.

His personal life was degenerating equally rapidly. The previous November, he'd been arrested for soliciting a man in a public toilet. Although it attracted little press attention at the time, he feared he wouldn't get off so easily again. And the second time was staring him straight in the face. A teen boy he'd known had been found dead and dismembered in a suitcase in January. Front-page stories about "The Suitcase Murders" promised police investigation of every known homosexual in London--which, Meek knew, now included him. He was seriously in debt, and the lease on his apartment/studio would be up soon. He was convinced he was about to be evicted.

Not too surprisingly, Meek was rapidly going crackers. Exacerbating his deteriorating mental state were his manic, amphetamine-fueled work habits. He was convinced that someone--the drug squad? EMI? his landlady?--had his studio bugged. Towards the end, he usually communicated with his assistant via notes so "they" couldn't hear him.

It all came to a head on the morning of February 3, 1967. Meek ended a night of frantic work by burning letters and documents in the studio, explaining in scribbled notes to his assistant, "They're not getting this." He then had his assistant fetch his landlady. There was a loud argument. As she turned to leave, he pulled out a shotgun and shot her in the back. He then reloaded the shotgun and blew his head off.

He left no note. But it couldn't have been a coincidence that he'd chosen to check out on the eighth anniversary of Buddy Holly's death.

Great Rock 'n' Roll Deaths #2: Les Harvey (Stone the Crows)

Scottish blues-based rock band Stone the Crows looked to be on the verge of serious stardom in 1972. In the wake of their most successful album, "Teenage Licks" (1971), singer Maggie Bell won "Best Female Vocalist" in the *Melody Makers* poll. Critics called her the next Janis Joplin, serious praise in 1972. With Led Zepplin manager Peter Grant calling the shots, they were regulars on the big UK rock festival circuit. But their seemingly unstoppable career was permanently derailed in a spectacular fashion before a gig in Swansea, Wales. During soundcheck at the Top Rank Ballroom, guitarist Les Harvey unwittingly completed the circuit between his guitar and a "live" mike. The shock killed him on the spot. Although the rest of the band tried to carry on, they never recaptured their momentum and drifted back into the obscurity of not-quite classic rock.

SPADE COOLEY

By MICHAEL McMAHON

1935

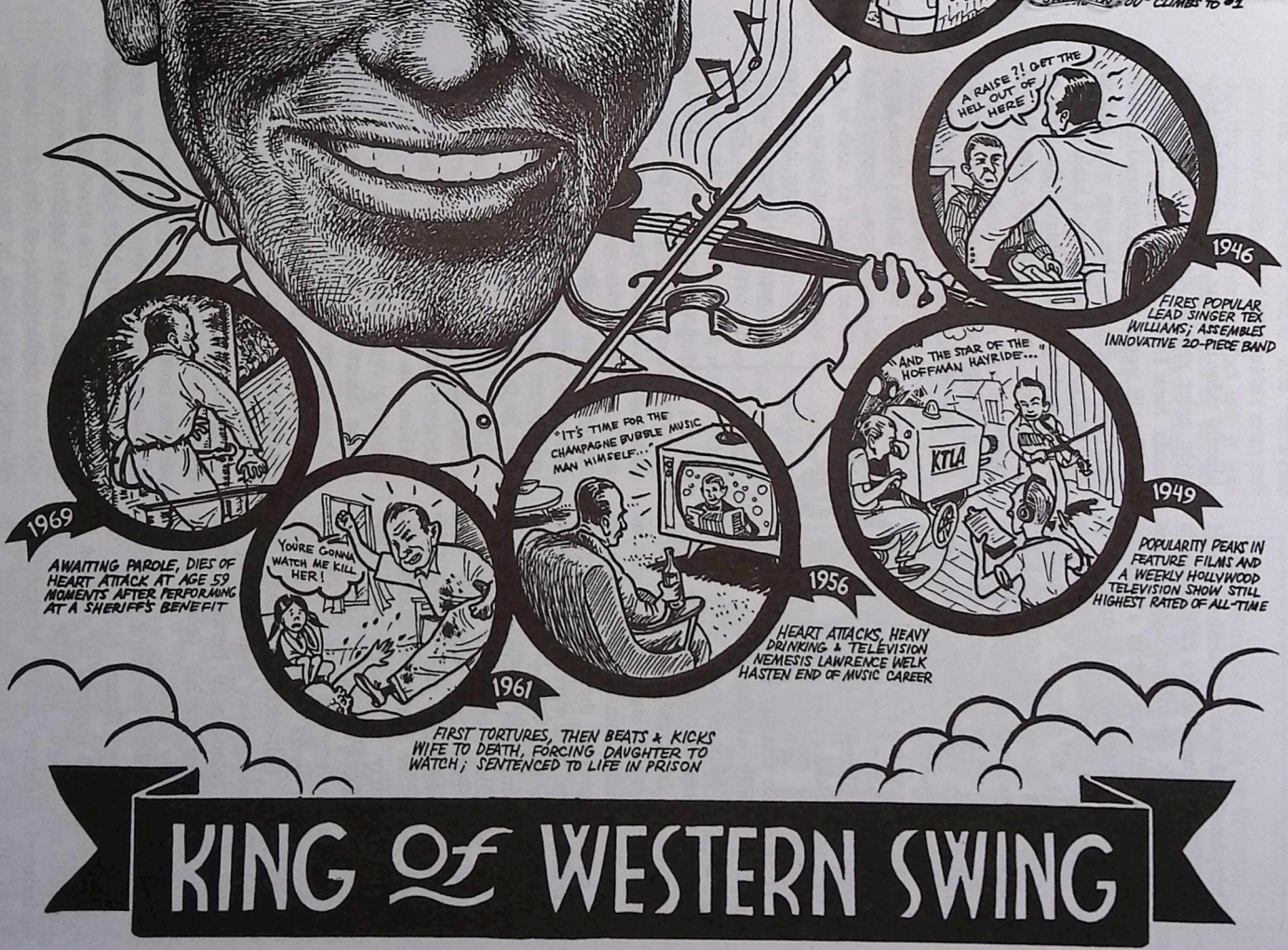
OKLAHOMA BORN DONNELL CLYDE COOLEY, EXPERT AT POKER & FIDDLIN' ARRIVES IN HOLLYWOOD AT AGE 25; BECOMES FRIEND & MOVIE STAND-IN TO ROY ROGERS

1943

RISES FROM FIDDLER TO LEADER OF JIMMY WAKELY'S WESTERN OUTFIT, SOON AFTER BEST: BOB WILLS IN "BATTLE OF THE BANDS" AT VENICE BALLROOM

1945

WEDS BAND MEMBER ELLA MAE EVANS AS RECORDING ARTIST


A RAISE?! GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!
1946
FIRES POPULAR LEAD SINGER TEX WILLIAMS; ASSEMBLES INNOVATIVE 20-PIECE BAND
"AND THE STAR OF THE HOFFMAN HAYRIDE..."
KTLA
1949
POPULARITY PEAKS IN FEATURE FILMS AND A WEEKLY HOLLYWOOD TELEVISION SHOW STILL HIGHEST RATED OF ALL-TIME
"IT'S TIME FOR THE CHAMPAGNE BUBBLE MUSIC MAN HIMSELF..."
1956
HEART ATTACKS, HEAVY DRINKING & TELEVISION NEMESIS LAWRENCE WELK HASTEN END OF MUSIC CAREER
YOU'RE GONNA WATCH ME KILL HER!
1961
FIRST TORTURES, THEN BEATS & KICKS WIFE TO DEATH, FORCING DAUGHTER TO WATCH; SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON
1969
AWAITING PAROLE, DIES OF HEART ATTACK AT AGE 59 MOMENTS AFTER PERFORMING AT A SHERIFF'S BENEFIT
KING OF WESTERN SWING

DYING FOR DAVID CASSIDY

The year 1974 was not kind to David Cassidy. The boy/man whose face graced a million junior high school lunch boxes was in trouble. Call it the portrait of a teen idol drowning. The network had moved his flagship TV series "The Partridge Family" to Saturday nights to compete head-to-head with the classic sitcom "All In the Family." The results were disastrous. Ratings were in free-fall. Sales of David Cassidy/Partridge Family records and merchandise were plummeting, with David's concert grosses in hot pursuit. He was well on his way to joining Bobby Sherman in the 1970s teen idol hall of oblivion.

The delicate Cassidy face framed gracefully with those oh-so-groovy falling locks, was rapidly disappearing from the covers of *16, Tiger Beat* and *Flip*. Self-respecting 14-yr. old girls no longer proclaimed their undying love for him on the cover of their school binders. Their sublimated lusts were being rapidly re-directed elsewhere. There was Donny, whose puppy dog eyes promised an eternal life of Mormon bliss; Tony DeFranco, whose heart only beat with the most innocent of love beats; and "Emergency's" rugged yet tender Randy Mantooth, who could chastely consummate any teenybopper's Electra complex. And waiting in the wings to complete an ironic circle of idolatry a few years down the road was David's little half-brother Shaun, who looked like nothing other than the issue of an incestuous relationship between David and his on-screen mother (and real-life stepmother) Shirley Jones.

David was rapidly becoming yesterday's hero in the United States. However, the Cassidy magic still lingered far overseas. In London and Tokyo, the little girls still understood. Ingenues named Margaret and Yoshi still slept in rooms encrusted with pinups of their super special guy, dreams of blissful rides in a bus sporting a Mondarin-style paint scheme dancing through their heads. New David Cassidy records, a drug on the US record market, continued to chart in Asia and Europe. The man who had so recently been the highest paid male solo act in the world had now achieved the acme of pop music has-beenism. He was big in Japan.

The time had come to take the money and run--after mounting one last glorious international tour.

It was to be a dozen or so shows in Japan, Australia, and Great Britain to cash-in on what was left of his teen idol magic and bring home the remnants of his demographic's disposable income. The tour began auspiciously enough. According to David's autobiographer, the flight to Japan was "a free-flying sexual circus" courtesy of some very swingin' Dutch stews straight out of *Coffee, Tea, Or Me?*. The heavy in-flight action and antics on the subsequent layover set the frenzied sensual tone for the tour.

The Japanese audiences responded ecstatically. In Australian David drew massive crowds--65,0000 girls packed one stadium in Melbourne. Their incessant shrieking totally drowned out their idol's music. Thanks to a stampede that injured dozens at one show, an Australian official branded him a public menace. Take that, Archie Bunker!

After single tumultuous show in Glasgow, the Cassidy entourage headed to England to finish the last leg of the tour. The end was near, in more ways than one.

The penultimate show of the tour was scheduled for Sunday, May 26th at London's White City Stadium. The venue symbolized David's decline. On his last British tour, he'd sold out eight nights at the far classier Wembley arena. Now, he was playing a one-off gig in a decrepit facility that normally

hosted second-rate soccer and third-rate greyhound racing. And he couldn't even sell out the dump. Despite the fact that it was widely known that this would be his last ever London concert, 3,000 tickets remained available at showtime.

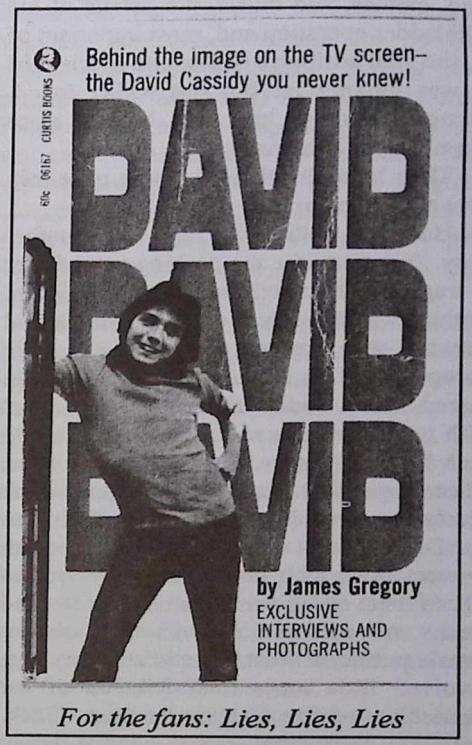
But there wasn't the slightest trace of apathy among the 37,000 teenage girls who started lining up early that morning more than 12 hours before show time. Traffic in the area was slowly reduced to gridlock as seemingly every remaining David Cassidy fan in southern England descended on White City for final communion with their extra super special guy. Promoters were forced to open the doors two hours early to accommodate what was rapidly becoming a mob.

Undoubtedly the crowd was sprinkled with casual fans, freeloading industry scum, camp visionaries (David was that month's *Gay Times* pinup boy) and no shortage of silently suffering parents and older siblings escorting little Shirley or Agatha to her first pop concert. But these infiltrators and posers were lost in a sea of hard-core fans who lived, ate, and breathed David Cassidy. No aspect of his life was too trivial, no incident too minor to be beneath their interest. Via the combined mediums of "Partridge Family" episodes, fan biographies and endless teen magazine articles, they'd come to know David, or at least his groovy neutered puppy dog image, better than their own brothers and sisters.

They'd vicariously suffered the pain of his first illness, the measles. They'd envied that "first girl in David's life," some comely vixen he'd met over pails and shovels in a New Jersey sandbox. They'd shed tears over the anguish the little 5-yr. old David suffered when his mother and father, the dashing actor Jack Cassidy, divorced. They endured with him the pain of his father's remarriage to his future screen mom, Shirley Jones and empathized with him when his mother moved him from New Jersey to California. They celebrated his birthday (April 12) as if it was a High Holy Day.

The thought of David at 10 as an awkward tenderfoot Boy Scout brought a gentle flutter to their hearts. They shared his love for horses. They desperately envied a girl named Reba, with whom David had had his first date with at 14. They'd scratch her eyes out, given half the chance. Their hearts went out to David the young aspiring actor as he did the rounds of Broadway agents and theatrical casting calls looking for any break, no matter how small. And that little role in the Broadway flop that got David into TV and ultimately on "The Partridge Family" and into their hearts--they shared in his triumph. They knew their David understood. If only they could talk to him! They knew their David would never blush, stammer, or try to stick his tongue in their mouths like all the disgustingly real boys they knew.

They devoured the fan magazines, treasured their "David Cassidy Annuals," watched "Partridge Family" re-runs obsessively, and (of course) played his records endlessly. They knew his tastes in



For the fans: Lies, Lies, Lies

food, clothes, and music, the details of his gallbladder operation and, most important of all, the vital attributes of that one special girl he was looking for but just hadn't found. Strangely enough, that girl bore a close resemblance to themselves.

They knew it all. Hell, some of it may have even been true.

But the truth--now that was another story. Jack Cassidy, the dashing actor father so tragically divorced from David's beautiful mother, was actually a notorious drunk and bisexual who boasted of sodomizing Cole Porter. The Los Angeles apartment David shared with a buddy, thoughtfully equipped with two bedrooms so the roommates could each "have a place where they could sit and talk to a girl in private;" well, talking wasn't nearly the most interesting thing that went on. David really wasn't into long, in-depth conversations with his fans; he preferred to talk to them as little as possible. His favored means of communion with his adoring female public, at least those of statutory age, involved little more than fellation of the reputedly oversize Cassidy member. "Suck, spit, and split"--that was the real Cassidy style.

But the excited teeny-boppers that made up the crowd on that Sunday of a bank holiday weekend were in innocent, ignorant bliss. Nor did they care. For them, the entire world had boiled down to the stage that would be soon trod upon by their dreams made flesh. Schemes to get as close as possible and--ohmigod could it happen??--perchance to meet their idol filled their heads. Surely, he could single them out and pluck them from the mob, so strongly did they radiate their special devotion.

Meanwhile, David's handlers carefully planned how they would smuggle their charge into and out of the stadium with as little fan contact as possible. They knew that David's adoring fans would cheerfully tear their idol limb-from-limb out of sheer ecstasy if given half a chance. It was going to be a long evening.

The level of hormone-fueled hysteria steadily grew as the clock ticked down to the climactic moment. The focal point of attention was the 14-foot stage in the center of the field where He would appear. About a third of the audience--some 10,000 girls--stood on the grass in front of the stage. These lucky early arrivals had staked out their share of the so-called "festival seating," happily standing for hours for the privilege of being just that much closer to David. The remainder of the crowd sat in the grandstand. The younger members of the seated contingent undoubtedly looked upon the standees enviously, even as their chaperones blessed the distance between them and what was rapidly becoming an unruly mob.

United by the love of David and unimpeded by the half-hearted security force, the fans on the field had pushed and pulled and packed themselves to near maximum density. Each inch nearer the stage was an inch nearer David, a goal that outweighed trivial thoughts of personal safety or physical comfort. The thousands of girls gradually congealed into a single mass of adolescent humanity. Stripped of their individuality, they could only move with the crowd. And the crowd had a mind of its own.

The mob had already began exacting its toll well before David hit the stage. It disgorged a steady stream of casualties: unconscious and semiconscious girls, some crushed in the sweaty, hormone-fueled mass, others merely overcome by hysteria. By the time DJ Tony Blackburn came on stage to introduce David, he had to plead with the frenzied girls to stop pushing. "If you move forward anymore, you will kill somebody." Perhaps they moved back an inch or so. But all sense of self preservation evaporated when David himself walked out onto the

stage.

The sight of Keith Partridge in the flesh was like a transcendent moment of religious ecstasy. The crowd exploded in a white hot crescendo of pubescent passion. Dresses were torn, shoes lost, and bladders spontaneously voided as the electric magic of DAVID coursed through the crowd. They surged towards the stage, screaming ecstatically. Many girls, teetering uncertainly on their oh-so-fashionable platform shoes, were bowled over in the initial rush. This triggered a domino effect that left them buried under twisting masses of squirming and shrieking bodies. Others were smashed against the stage, or merely squished in the crush.

Before this scene of adolescent mayhem, David pirouetted and preened his way through favorite Partridge Family hits like "I Think I Love You" and "I Woke Up This Morning," He tossed in some early Beatles numbers and a few of his own mediocre Stephen Stills-influenced originals for variety. From what observers could make out over the ear-splitting screaming, David did a decent job with light pop material in what one reviewer described as "a surprisingly old-fashioned show." The critics were not kind; one review led off with "...there was a well-publicized death--of sorts--at the White City Stadium last night." David, a critic wrote, "...gave the overall impression of an early '50s crooner suddenly trying to catch up." Meanwhile, another sort of death, soon to be even more well publicized, was occurring somewhere in the heart of the crowd.

Her name was Bernadette Whelan. She was 14-years old, and she loved David Cassidy. She had come to the show with her friend Margaret Kirk; for weeks, they had thought of little else than May 26th at White City. They'd been there since morning, lining up in hopes of getting that special spot near the front of the stage. And they'd succeeded, little knowing that this answer to their dreams was really a nightmare.

Their happiness and excitement turned to terror in an instant hit the stage. The surge of the crowd tore Margaret away from Bernadette. For the next several minutes, Margaret was tossed to and fro by the crowd, her feet frequently leaving the ground. All thoughts of David evaporated from her mind as she desperately fought her way out. It wasn't easy. At one point, she was blocked by a veritable mound of girls knocked down by the surge. She later testified at the inquest, "We couldn't get over them. There was a young girl at the bottom. She was very still."

Meanwhile, somewhere deep in darkest heart of David Cassidy fandom, Bernadette went down. The exact details were never determined. Perhaps she was a victim of fashion, stumbling in her platform shoes. Or maybe she was simply knocked over by a random surge of the crowd. Rescuers found her at the bottom of one of the many piles of teenagers that filled the field that day. Crushed by the weight of perhaps of ton of terrified teens, she'd stopped breathing. Rescuers were able to re-start her respiration, but she remained unconscious as they rushed her to the hospital.

About 20 minutes into the set, David pleaded with his enraptured fans, "Get back, get back. They're going to stop the show, they're going to pull the plug on me. You've got to maintain--cool it!" Yet not even he could soothe the frenzied teenyboppers. He had to leave the stage. In attempt to calm the crowd, the promoters played inconsequential, non-Cassidy music like "The Wombles of Wimbledon" over the PA. But the screams continued to fill White City Stadium--screams of fear, not ecstasy. On a bootleg tape of the show played for the benefit of the coroner's jury, panicked girls can be plainly heard pleading "Please get me out!" as lightweight pop music echoed in the background.

Finally some sense of calm was restored and David returned to finish his set. The final box score: 500 injured, 30 seriously enough to be hospitalized. An official of the British Safety Council called it a "suicide concert." Another witness, a veteran of Beatlemania and the notorious Anfield Road

Kop* described the on-field action as "the equivalent of three modern infantry divisions doing a banzai charge at one fixed position." He was amazed that Bernadette was the only serious injury.

The next day, David's handlers were kind enough to send an enormous bouquet to Bernadette in the hospital. The card read: "Please get well soon, best wishes, David Cassidy." Perhaps these heartfelt sentiments coming from her idol could have rallied her if she'd been consciousness to read them.

Even as Bernadette lay comatose in a London hospital, the Cassidy entourage rolled into Manchester for David's final show as a teen idol. Once more, the venue was a soccer stadium. But this time, the joint was first class and promoters were taking no chances. Fans were carefully and sternly confined to the grandstand to scream at David a safe distance from the stage on the field. Even with these precautions, the negative publicity generated by the London show inspired many Mancunian parents to return tickets, no doubt over the distraught wails of many a daughter. Contrary to the account in David's autobiography, *C'mon Get Happy: Fear And Loathing On The Partridge Family Bus* (which claimed a 40,000 strong crowd "knowing it was my absolute farewell show--made more noise than any I'd ever heard..."), contemporary newspaper accounts paint a portrait of a commercial disaster. The stand was only half full. A mere 9,000 fans had shown up to bid their idol adieu. Even at their loudest, their screams echoed emptily in a stadium that normally housed 50,000 fans of the Manchester City Football Club. David was dead.

Bernadette never regained consciousness. She died two days later. Initial widely publicized reports (which are still cited today) blamed her death on a congenital heart defect.** That she died in the middle of a frenzied, out-of-control mob at a David Cassidy concert was sheer coincidence. It could have happened just as easily at school or at afternoon tea. The promoter also angrily disputed the casualty figures for the concert. He claimed that many girls hauled out of the crowd on stretchers were merely feigning unconsciousness as a ruse to get backstage; once they realized the stretcher bearers were taking them out of the stadium, they suddenly "revived." If it wasn't for those conniving girls and Bernadette's darn heart, it would have been a wonderful show!

But the ugly truth came out at the inquest. Bernadette had died of a heart defect only in the sense that just about anyone's heart will stop if you pile enough teenage girls to keep them from breathing. The official verdict was traumatic asphyxia, probably suffered at the bottom of a pile of her fellow fans. She'd been literally died for David Cassidy.

* The late, lamented standing-room only section of the Liverpool soccer club's grandstand renowned throughout the UK for the "enthusiasm" of its fans.

** In the autobiography, there's a solemn scene where David, or at least his autobiographer, describes looking at old newspaper microfilms to discover the truth about Bernadette's death. Bet you won't hear that on "Behind the Music."

Great Jazz Deaths #1: Wardell Gray

Wardell Gray was one of the leading post-war jazz tenor saxophonists in Los Angeles. He played with everyone from Benny Goodman to Charlie Parker. The tenor duels he cut with Dexter Gordon are classics of '50s jazz, and their live battles the stuff of legend. He would be better remembered today if he hadn't become the Bobby Fuller of bop.

On May 25, 1955, while he was playing with Benny Carter's band at the Moulin Rouge (Las Vegas's pioneering integrated hotel-casino), he missed the second set. He was found the next afternoon dead in a patch of weeds four miles out of town. His neck was broken and his head battered.

Official reports claimed Gray fell off the bed in his hotel room after injecting a particularly good shot of heroin. He landed hard enough to break his neck and bang up his head. (And no, it wasn't a bunk bed). His drug cronies, obviously not relishing a police investigation, loaded his body into a car and dumped it out in the desert.

Rumors of foul play, however, lingered. One story pinned Gray's death on a cuckolded white high roller. Others involve gambling creditors and /or irate drug dealers armed with the inevitable "hot shots." An intriguing variant of the latter theory has the pushers actually out for Sonny Stitt, another tall skinny black tenor saxophonist (hey, they all look alike) who had the bad habit of not paying his drug bills.

For once, the theorists have it. The post-mortem investigation was sloppy and incompetent, if not outright corrupt. There's a good chance that the truth about Gray's death involves a lot more than drug-induced misadventure. Alas, if we only knew which sweaty-palmed theorist to believe....

Great Folk Deaths #1: Nick Drake

In a genre heavy with annoying poseurs, overt phonies and outright frauds, Nick Drake stands out. Other folkie singer/songwriters sing about being sad, lonely, and depressed. Drake lived it. He felt sad and lonely because he was severely and clinically depressed. He capped his brief career with a fatal over-dose of anti-depressants. Now that's sincerity!

Fortunately, his music more than lives up to his gold-standard demise. Quiet and lush, yet stark and haunting, it can make converts among the most cynical. Commercially unsuccessful--the early '70s singer-songwriter fad favored such "geniuses" as Cat Stevens, James Taylor, and Jackson Brown--his reputation has grown steadily, almost exponentially since his death. He's the singer/songwriter for people who hate singer/songwriters.

Despite a book-length biography and a feature-length documentary, he remains a shadowy figure. He apparently started out as a male version of those depressed poet girls too sensitive to live. Luckily, he was lively enough to catch the ear of a folk talent scout in London. He was 20 when his first album, "Five Leaves Left" came out in 1968. For all the record company's enthusiasm, it sold poorly. And Drake was not cut out to hit the boards in its support. Whatever assurance as a performer he had once had was slowly disappearing. Contemporary accounts describe him as shy, awkward and obviously uncomfortable on stage. He only played in public a few dozen times. No film footage of him performing exists.

The response to 1970's "Bryter Later" was equally underwhelming. It gave him the last thing a clinically depressed person needs: a real reason to be depressed. The first (and only!) time he was interviewed by a music journalist, the poor guy had a whale of a time getting Drake to say anything other than "yes," "no" and "um." By the time he recorded his final album, "Pink Moon" in 1972, he could barely talk. According to legend, he dropped off the master tape at the record company's front desk without a word of explanation.

He moved back in with his parents soon after. He took his fatal overdose (possibly by accident) in 1974. He never saw the first traces of his growing cult. But at least he was spared the sight of his music being used to sell Volkswagens to aging Baby Boomers.

HANGING AROUND WITH THE BAND

It all began in the late '50s with Ronnie Hawkins, a frenetic Arkansas rock 'n' roll singer cutting a wide swath across North America. He never had a major hit, although he came close with "40 Days" and "Mary Lou" in 1959. But his performances were the stuff of legend. Playing a tough circuit that stretched from Mississippi Delta juke joints to the surprisingly disorderly dives of Toronto's Yonge Street, Hawkins gave the intoxicated barroom crowds what they wanted: set after set of straight ahead raucous rock 'n' roll played with seasoned expertise and rare abandon. Bottles would break, beer would fly, and local girls would inexplicably vanish backstage between sets. If the booze and the brawls didn't leave the crowd spent, Ronnie Hawkins' take-no-prisoners brand of rock 'n' roll would.

Behind him, Hawkins slowly built an uncommonly tight band. Inevitably christened "The Hawks," it was anchored by drummer Levon Helm, the band's token American. One by one, the Hawk added the cream of Canadian rock 'n' roll to the Hawks: bassist Rick Danko, guitarist Robbie Robertson, organist Garth Hudson, and pianist Richard Manuel. The teenage Can-Am quintet meshed unaccountably well. That they were tight wasn't surprising; this was in the days when rock 'n' roll bands went out and earned a living on the road instead of sitting around the local bar whining about the sad state of the scene. A band backing the Hawk had to play pretty darn hard to earn their supper: five hours a night, seven nights a week for crowds far keener than any critic. There's nothing like the threat of a beer bottle barrage or worse to encourage journeymen musicians to get their chops down. Levon Helm later recalled, "We played places on an Oklahoma Indian reservation where we felt we wouldn't get out alive if they didn't like us."

The Hawks finally parted ways with their raucous mentor in late '63. Behind the split were the inevitable musical differences; the band wanted to get heavier into the R&B thing while their more traditionally-minded boss just couldn't give up pure rock 'n' roll. And there was a bit of a generation gap. Hawkins had taken to fining his musicians $25 every time he caught them smoking marijuana.

Renaming themselves Levon & the Hawks, they hit New York in search of fame and fortune. They were soon gigging around town regularly and building a reputation as a musician's band. Word of their prowess even reached the unlikely ears of Bob Dylan--unlikely in that Dylan was then the voice and the idol of the oh-so-earnest folk music scene. Folkies were then obsessed with acoustic music and phony authenticity,[1] rock 'n' roll was considered an aesthetically and morally primitive musical form beneath contempt. The Hawks, not only did they use amplifiers, there probably wasn't a single *Sing Out!* subscriber in the band. This antipathy was mutual. As Manuel disdainfully said of Dylan, "He's a strummer." But the times were changing. An air of fusion was blowing through the land, bearing before it the unlikely genre of folk-rock. Dylan was going electric and he needed a band to do it. And that band was Levon and the Hawks.

The Hawks weren't with Dylan at his legendary turn at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. But that storied gig was a dress rehearsal for what awaited them. After playing the first half of his set acoustically, Dylan was joined by Al Kooper and most of

---

[1] The more extreme elements of the folk scene chastised Dylan for daring to perform original material instead of obscure Appalachian ballads and 18th century British workmen's songs that constituted the "cool" canon.

the resolutely non acoustic Paul Butterfield Blues Band. It was sacrilege, a defilement of the altar of the highest temple of folkdom. The audience *booed* Dylan and his electric Visgoths as they slogged through eight amplified numbers. Backstage, free speech advocate and banjoist Pete "This machine kills fascists" Seeger and Smithsonian folk archivist Alan Lomax tried in vain to cut the power cable with an ax. After the band left the stage, MC and convicted child molester to-be Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul & Mary) reassured the mutinous crowd--folk music fans!!--that "He's going to get an acoustic guitar." Sure enough, Dylan strolled back out on stage alone a few minutes later. He pointedly played "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" and "Mr. Tambourine Man" acoustically to placate the riotous mob.

Dylan probably hadn't had as much fun in years. After one more raucous acoustic/electric gig at the Forest Hills Tennis Stadium with a pick-up band, he signed The Hawks to back him on his subsequent world tour. The same perverse drama played itself out each night. First Dylan played an acoustic set, strumming his guitar and tooting his harmonica in orthodox folkie fashion. Audiences were rapt; he still was the voice of his generation. He merited reverence and respect. Then the Hawks joined him. Audiences were not amused Concert halls and arenas across the United States and England echoed with boos and catcalls and accusations of "Sellout" and "Judas." Crowds taunted the band to "Go back to England" and stomped and clapped in unison in a futile attempt to drown out the electric cacophony. The negative response was so intense ever sensitive artiste Levon Helm quit and fled to the comparatively tranquil life of a roughneck on a Gulf of Mexico offshore oil rig. A hastily-recruited studio drummer with a firmer stomach replaced him for the duration.

After the tour, the remaining Hawks joined Dylan in his stomping grounds around Woodstock, New York. The following year, Dylan suffered his legendary, and perhaps apocryphal motorcycle accident. He spent the next few years in seclusion. During his extended recuperation, he amused himself by making home tapes with the Hawks. Portions of these tapes slowly trickled out where they were dubbed (sorry) "The Basement Tapes." Demand for new Dylan product was so intense that several hip, if shadowy, entrepreneurs leaped in, assembling and releasing unauthorized albums like "The Great White Wonder." Thus was born the modern bootlegging industry.

Thanks to the Dylan association and their burgeoning, if bootlegged, popularity, the Hawks signed their own contract with Capitol They wanted to call themselves "The Crackers" but some wag in the Capitol executive suite changed it to "The Band." The name stuck. Figuring no one was going to boo them in the recording studio, Helm turned his back on a promising career in the petroleum production industry and reclaimed the drummer's chair. Thus was born The Band.

The rest was a chapter in rock history, albeit one of the more boring ones. These days, The Band's brand of "country rock" sounds dull, ponderous, and more than a little bit stupid. But at the time, rock critics and sophisticated hippies took them really seriously. The Band never had a major hit; the best they ever did was 1969's "Up On Cripple Creek" which peaked at #25. But their albums sold well and were the favorites of hipper-than-thou record store clerks and stoned free-form/AOR-djs everywhere. Their first album, "Music From the Big Pink," was adored by critics across the spectrum of hipness. Even *Life* magazine gave it a good review! Their follow-up album, "The Band" went gold and got them on the cover of *Time*. Their fourth album, "Rock of Ages" was *Rolling Stones'* album of the year in 1972.

Nor were they death at the concert turnstiles. They would never tour much, but when they did, it would be for appreciative audiences and packed houses. They did some well-received turns on the festival circuit, including Woodstock and the even

larger, albeit totally forgotten, Watkins Glen festival.[2] Such was their stature Miles Davis once opened for them at the Hollywood Bowl.

Their career peaked in 1974. They re-united with Dylan to play 40 shows in 25 cities across the country. The tour epitomized the excesses of '70s rock. Transportation was via "The Starship," a Boeing 707 jet customized to meet the needs of a rock star clientele. For $5 a mile, the rock aristocracy was treated to full bedrooms, bars, a lounge, a video playback system (high luxury in 1974!) and an electric piano. The venues were hockey rinks and basketball arenas. The top ticket price was $9.50, but scalpers were asking $75 for the treasured tickets. Additional recreations for the musicians would include flocks of groupies and mountains of illicit powdered pharmaceutical-grade stimulants. There were some 15 million requests for the 658,000 available tickets. Dylan was expected to personally walk away with $1.5 million. (Rumors flew that he planned to donate it to the Israeli war effort.) The entourage was lousy with rock critics and *Rolling Stone* reporters. The event was so momentous *Rolling Stone* even rushed a mass market paperback, *Knockin' on Dylan's Door: On the Road in '74,* to head shops and college bookstores across the country.

The Band toured again in 1976, this time without Dylan. Although it was successful in its own right, it didn't even threaten to change the course of history. It was no repeat of 1974. Chalk it up to changing times, the absence of the D-man, the lack of the Starship or whatever. It wasn't the same. Nonetheless, everyone (even supposedly some of the musicians!) were surprised when, part way through, The Band announced their retirement plans. This tour was it. After the last show, American rock would have to struggle on without The Band.

The last show of the tour was Thanksgiving Day at San Francisco's Winterland, a converted ice rink that would host the Sex Pistols' last show two years later. Being The Band, it wasn't just another tour-ending blow-out. It was going to be An Event, or more precisely, The Last Waltz. The festivities started with a sit-down Thanksgiving turkey dinner with all the trimmings for several thousand mostly stoned celebrants courtesy of promoter Bill Graham. It ended with the usual disgraceful spectacle of the headliners being joined by every chemically impaired musician that could stumble onto the stage to "jam." No less a personage than Martin Scorcese filmed the proceedings for a feature-length documentary, later released as "The Last Waltz." ("It started as a concert. It ended as a celebration." Ugh!) The Band at least went out with a bang.

In later years, other members of The Band complained that "The Last Waltz" was all Ronnie Robertson's idea. Sick of touring, he had huddled with management and presented it to the rest of The Band as a *fiat accompli*. There was further grumbling from Band members not named Robertson that the finished film looked like the last performance of Ronnie Robertson and His Backing Band. Guess which guitarist was helping out his pal Martin in the editing room?

In retrospect, it wasn't a bad move. Changes were brewing in the rock world which would not be kind to bloated

---

[2] The Long Island festival drew some 600,000 people in 1973! Unfortunately, security was adequate, the weather clement, and sanitation facilities sufficient. It went off without a hitch and has naturally been completely forgotten.

holdovers from the '60s like The Band. Sure, there was still plenty of money to be made, but little artistic credibility to be gained. Their audience over the next few years would be aging and more interested in the then than the now. As for the kids--they preferred Journey and Loverboy. They didn't give a damn about Dylan. Why would they bother with his sometime back-up band? Quitting in 1976 was Joe Dimaggio. 1980 would be Michael Jordan--the third time.

Robertson's sense of timing was impeccable. But he also seems to have known something the rest of the guys didn't. Sometime during that long last tour, he said, "I'm tired of the danger out there. How long before someone dies?"

The answer: exactly 10 years

Like all self respecting rock stars of the '70s, The Band's glory years are well filled with tales of debauchery and excess, drugs and divorce, and realizations of every illicit vision dancing in the eyes of young guitarists. Thanks to detoxification clinics, quality management and competent legal advice, most members of The Band came through more or less healthy, sane, and solvent. There was only one exception: their "sensitive" keyboardist, Richard Manuel.

Manuel appears to have been pretty much of a mess from early on. Sure, he was a keyboard whiz who could double on the drums. He could also sing; his gentle falsetto vocals were especially revered. He was known in Canada as "The White Ray Charles," a sobriquet that can be taken on many levels, not all of them complimentary. He sang lead on some of The Bands' most effective numbers. Dylan wrote "I Shall Be Released" especially for his voice.

Off-stage was another story. Levon Helm's wife remembered Manuel back in the '60s as "a self-deprecating, funny, soulful, sweet, extremely self-destructive major alcoholic (with) ..zero information on how to live." The true extent of Manuel's degradation and excess are long since lost in hushed up police reports, drug rehab clinics records and the not-so-fond memories of aging groupies. But the tidbits that survive intrigue.

There was that memorable year of 1973. Manuel penchant for cranking rented Ferraris up to 140 mph and wrecking them put him at the top of every car dealers "do not rent" list. He was drinking and drugging with an abandon uncommon even for him. He was in such poor shape that no less a personage than Bob Dylan, the great communicator himself, went up to Woodstock to try to talk some sense into him. The trip was in vain. He found Manual living in a true state of alcoholic squalor. There was so much dog shit on the floor of his house--the place reeked of it--Dylan couldn't bring himself to cross the threshold. So much for intervention.

Manuel somehow managed to collect enough of himself to go on the '74 tour with Dylan. Visions of the cocaine to come were no doubt a major incentive. Yet he found that not all the pleasures of the road were as they should be. Sure, the drugs were fine and the audiences great, but the girls...there was something lacking in that department. He resorted to having the roadies snap Polaroids of would-be groupies. After shows, he would pre-screen applicants in the comfort of his dressing room before dispatching some flunkie to fetch the lucky winner.

After the tour, The Band stayed on in California to do some recording. Manuel set up housekeeping of sorts in a Zuma Beach bungalow. There was a touch of funky glamour to his temporary home; it had once been a stable housing TV's Mr. Ed. It probably had smelled better in those days. Manuel slowly reduced the bungalow to a state of squalor that would have appalled its previous occupants.

His favorite pastime in those days was drinking himself into oblivion in a truly pathological fashion. Most alcoholics prefer your classic distilled spirits (gin, whiskey, vodka) or perhaps beer, libations that go down easy and sit well. Manuel's tipple of choice, however, was Grand Marnier, a sweet, syrupy orange-flavored brandy. Now, Grand Marnier is a perfectly fine beverage--a little splash of it on the rocks is a satisfying conclusion to a fine meal. But Manuel downed it at a stomach-churning clip of seven or eight *bottles* per day. When his band mates finally pried him out of the bungalow a year later, they found some 2,000 empty Grand Marnier bottles lying about the premises. At least Mr. Ed had let a stable boy in to sweep up his messes.

On the 1976 tour, there wasn't too much doubt who was The Band's weakest link. Manuel was drinking heavily, doing lord knows what kind of drugs, and in all-around poor shape. (History is mum on whether he continued with the Polaroids). He had his good nights and his bad nights. They turned mostly bad about 2/3 of the way through the tour when he was injured in a boating accident. Chances are Robertson was thinking of Manuel when he made his quip about the hazards of life on the road. Manuel barely appears on-screen in "The Last Waltz."

After the big split, Manuel spent the next few years killing time by drinking copiously as he awaited the inevitable reunion. Eventually he realized it could be a while before he saw the inside of the Starship. He quit drugs, kicked the Grand Marnier habit, and sobered up in 1978.

Those next few years were quiet. Each member of The Band pursued in their own fashion the inevitably undistinguished, if not nonexistent, solo career. But like so many other performers, some of them couldn't forget the roar of the crowd, the thrill of the road, and the joy of playing their music for an appreciative audience.

All the members of The Band save Ronnie Robertson re-united in 1983 to play a few gigs in the US, Canada, and Japan. The shows were good and the audiences receptive. They followed up in 1985 with a small tour in support of fellow '60s "survivors" Crosby, Stills & Nash. Buoyed by this success, they booked their own tour for the following year. Only Ronnie Robertson continued to have the sense to stay home.

The death of Albert Grossman, their old manager of a heart attack in February put a damper on their coming comeback. They all took it hard; Grossman had been instrumental in hooking them up with Dylan and getting them their record contract. But Manuel took it the worst. He'd been particularly close to Grossman. Grossman had even been helping Manuel untangle his twisted finances. He turned for comfort to the one friend that had never failed him: Grand Marnier.

On this less-than-auspicious note, The (Ronnie Robertson-less) Band set out on their Big 1986 Comeback Tour: a series of one-nighters at small clubs scattered across Florida. It was perhaps the least auspicious reunion tour in rock history.

From the very first night, a depressing air hung over the entourage. It's hard to ride a bus through the Florida outback after jetting from city to city on The Starship. No amount of audience enthusiasm could compensate for headcounts running in the hundreds, not hundreds of thousands. The Band had come a long way from Woodstock and Watkins Glen, all of it downhill.

The crew tried to lighten thing up by nicknaming it "The Death Tour." Black humor was the order of they day. One running joke was to ask Manuel, "How's the piano?" His stock response, after tinkling the tuneless keys of the house upright, was to grimace and mime slipping a noose about his neck.

As the tour wore on, it became plain to the rest of The Band that Manuel was having a hard time of it. When he had good nights, things were fine. But when he had bad nights, it wasn't quite so happy. The acid test was whether he could he hit the high notes in "Tears of Rage." If he did, they knew they were going to have a good show.

The gig on March 3 seemed to go better

than most. They played at the Cheek to Cheek Lounge, described as an "upscale fern bar" in the Orlando suburb of Winter Park. They did two sets, reprising all their well-known numbers for an appreciative capacity crowd of locals and Disneyworld tourists. Everyone agrees it was one of their "good nights." Levon Helm later recalled, "Richard did 'You Don't Know Me' and it made me want to cry." The critics may have kvetched about The Band's failure replace Robertson's song writing, but the consensus said The Band was playing their old material as well as they ever had.

After the show, Manuel visited Helm in his room at the Quality Inn. They sat around and chatted amiably for a few hours about the good old days and the not-so-good new ones. Manuel told Helm that ..."playing these little joints after playing in Japan you just feel you're slipping." Helm remembered him as being depressed, but no more than everyone else on this tour.

Manuel went back to his own room around 2:30 AM. He'd forgotten his key and had to wake his wife to get in. She later remarked that he seemed pretty annoyed for a lost key, but she thought nothing of it at the time. They talked for a few minutes. Manuel told her he'd join her in bed after he finished watching a movie on television with Helm.

When she woke up the next morning, he was gone. She assumed he was already on the tour bus. She rushed out and picked up some breakfast take-out at a nearby fast-food restaurant. She came back in the room, went into the bathroom and made the ghoulish discovery. Manuel had played his last gig.

His cold body dangled from the shower curtain rod, his belt wrapped around his neck. He'd apparently gone into the bathroom shortly after his wife went back to sleep. Taking his belt, he slipped the end through the buckle and put the improvised noose around his neck. He then carefully looped the free end around the shower rod and tucked it underneath. Then he sat down--hard. The jerk was strong enough to pop a few screws out of the wall. But the bathroom hardware lived up to the motel chain's name. The rod held fast, and Manuel's technique, determination and/or intoxication was enough to keep him from simply standing up, unstaring his belt and going to bed to be fresh for another night of gigging for Gaiter state revelers.

An empty bottle of his beloved Grand Marnier was found in the motel room. An autopsy would reveal that he was drunk (BAC=.15--almost twice the legal level for driving) and had taken cocaine sometime in the previous 24 hours. He was just short of his 43rd birthday.

The surviving members of The Band hastily canceled their next gigs and flew back to Canada for the funeral. Ronnie Robertson agreed to do the eulogy, but was a no-show at the last minute due to a bad case of the flu. Garth Hudson played an instrumental version of "I Shall Be Released," Manuel's signature song Dylan had written especially for him so many years ago. It was the same song Manuel had sung to great effect at Albert Grossman's funeral the previous month.

And then the surviving members of The Band hired a replacement keyboardist, got on a plane, and flew down to Florida to finish the tour.

Great Rock 'n' Roll Deaths #3: Eddie Cochran

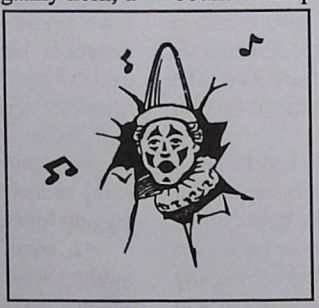
Pioneering rockabilly guitarist Eddie Cochran just missed making rock 'n' roll's great death trio (Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and "The Big Bopper") a quartet. The author and performer of classics like "Summertime Blues" and "C'mon Everybody" was booked on that ill-fated 1959 Winter Dance Party tour but canceled at the last minute. After the crash, he presciently told friends he felt like he was living on borrowed time. Sure enough, the following April he was killed in a car crash while touring England. Also injured in the accident was fellow rockabilly star Gene Vincent. Although Vincent recovered, his injuries inspired a drinking problem that contibuted to his premature death 11 years later.

FRANK ROSOLINO WAS A FUNNY GUY

Everyone always agreed about one thing.

Frank Rosolino was a funny guy.

He was also one of the top jazz trombonists of the bop era. He brought a fluidity and speed normally associated with the tenor sax his somewhat ungainly horn, a skill he picked up, he claimed, as a kid trying to keep up with his violinist brother. He combined his unusual technical virtuosity with a keen feeling for jazz and an instinctual faculty for improvising in the bop and cool idioms. He was a key player in liberating the almost archaic slide trombone—it's the only horn that sidestepped the invention of valves and remains almost unchanged from Bach and Beethoven's day—from an also ran of the brass section to a legitimate solo instrument in modern jazz.



He was only a teenager when left his native Detroit in 1940 to go on the road with the big bands. He hit the big time in the early '50s as a featured soloist in Stan Kenton's "New Concepts" band. The critics named him "New Star" on the trombone in the 1953 *Downbeat* poll. For years afterward, he was a top-five fixture among trombonists in the year-end fan polls.

After leaving the Kenton band in 1955, he quickly established himself as the leading trombonist in the then hot West Coast jazz scene centered in Los Angeles. For several years he was with Harold Rumsey's Lighthouse All-Stars, one of the most coveted jazz gigs west of the Jersey state line. The All-Stars played five nights a week at (where else?) The Lighthouse Cafe, a waterfront nautical-themed bar turned modern jazz club on Hermosa Beach. The company was congenial; the Lighthouse All-Star alumni register reads like a who's who of West Coast jazz. And the regular line-up was regularly supplemented by the best talent in the country. Rare was the touring musician who passed through Los Angeles without stopping by the Lighthouse to sit in with the All-Stars. It was the southern California modern jazz fan's answer to Times Square: sit there long enough and sooner or later, your favorite musician was bound to drop by and jam.

The Lighthouse was a jazz musician's dream gig. Pay was decent. Although the audiences were occasionally rowdy and frequently covered with sand, having literally walked in straight off the beach, bathing suits and all, they were mostly appreciative and attentive. Recording opportunities were frequent. And the music was jazz--not pop, lounge, or some hit-parade schlock, but pure unadulterated modern jazz played as inventively as the musicians wanted. At times the experimentation got out of hand. One incarnation of the All-Stars featured a pair of sax players who doubled on flute and oboe. But during its mid '50s heyday, the Lighthouse was one of the premier venues to hear and play jazz in southern California. A steady jazz gig without traveling--dangle that in front of a touring musician after another all-night bus ride through a Midwestern snowstorm to the 20th consecutive one-nighter. A veteran of far too many such rides, Rosolino must have thought he'd found a little piece of heaven on the Orange County coast. He later recalled his Lighthouse days fondly: "People came in off the beach, the music was beautiful, and the atmosphere was great."

Rosolino spent five years at the Lighthouse. He was featured on many of the All-Star's best records, most notably "Lighthouse at Laguna" and "Music For Lighthouskeeping." He was also in high demand in movie and record company studios. Whenever the chart called for a trombone, the call went out for Frank Rosolino. He played on literally dozens of

records during the hot years of West Coast jazz. He said, "If I had them all, I'd have a housefull." He only recorded a handful of records as a leader--he had the misfortune be a trombonist in a time when the highest kudos were reserved for trumpeters and saxophonists. But musicians, producers and critics all respected him for his playing and writing. One of his compositions, "Blue Daniel," even became a bit of a jazz standard. If it's modern jazz recorded in Los Angeles between 1955 and 1962 and you hear a trombone, odds are it's Rosolino manning the slide.

The strangest jazz vocal CD you'll ever own

Frank Rosolino's name is virtually unknown outside the jazz world. But even if you hate jazz, you've heard Frank Rosolino. His trombone pops up everywhere, from pop music (he was on several of Frank Sinatra's Capitol albums) to classic jazzy movie soundtracks like "The Man With the Golden Arm" and "Sweet Smell of Success." Rosolino's name was high on every producer's trombone call list.

You've probably even seen Frank Rosolino. Perhaps his most notable big screen appearance was his walk on bit in "The Sweet Smell of Success."[1] As jazz guitarist Steve Dallas (Martin Milner) leaves the jazz club with a reefer planted in his pocket by corrupt publicity agent Sidney Falco (Tony Curtis), he passes a trombone-toting Frank Rosolino. Rosolino takes the stand and starts jamming with the band. The camera cuts to Milner outside. To the sound of a frenetic Rosolino solo, tension builds as Milner walks down a dark sidewalk straight into a carefully orchestrated police trap.

His most widely seen TV clip features a shockingly clean-cut and alarmingly youthful Frank Zappa on the "Tonight" show making his legendary television debut showing Steve Allen how to "play" a bicycle. Rosolino is plainly visible in the background, puffing away at his trombone as the band accompanies Steve & Frank's free improvisation.

Musicians respected Rosolino for his chops. But they revered him for his wit. Everyone knew Frank Rosolino was a funny guy. He was an irrepressible fount of be-bop hi-jinks, spewing out an endless stream of dry, snappy one liners and goofy gags, interspersed with the occasional practical joke. On the Kenton band's 1953 European tour, he appointed himself "tour guide," commandeering the bus microphone and keeping the weary musicians in stitches with such little known facts about the countryside as "The Rhine is where the natives bide their time fishing for rhinestones." In the recording studio, he livened up proceedings by doing silly dance routines during other musician's solos. On stage, he'd bring the house down with his goofy nasal scatting on "I've Got A Right To Sing The Blues" and "Lemon Drop" and his unequaled comic yodeling on "Pennies From Heaven." (He is indisputably the greatest yodeler in jazz history.) An airplane ride with the never predictable but always ridiculous Rosolino as a your seatmate could either be the funniest flight of your life or a slow descent into comic hell. The man just never let up, keeping every tour, every recording session in a continual state of humorous uproar. To Rosolino, everyone was a "cat" and everything was always "a gas."

[1] Your editor's all-time favorite movie.

His fellow musicians loved it. Tales of his hi-jinks circulated throughout the jazz world and became the stuff of legend. A typically outrageous tale comes from his days playing in Stan Kenton's big band. Now, Stan Kenton took his music very seriously--saxophonist Art Pepper once cracked if Kenton had gone into religion, he would have been Billy Graham. The Kenton bands were never just "The Stan Kenton Band." They were carried ponderous names like "New Concepts of Artistry in Rhythm" or "Innovations in Modern Music." They played serious, elaborately arranged "progressive jazz" intended for a concert hall audience on a scale (and at a volume) not seen before or since.

It was in Detroit. The house was packed. The band was swinging. And just as Kenton launched into his big piano solo, a lit firecracker thrown by you-know-who detonated under the piano. History is mum on what ensued, but it's a testament to Rosolino's lovable qualities and musical skill that Kenton didn't fire him on the spot. Later, on one of the Kenton band's most famous numbers, "Prologue: This Is An Orchestra," Kenton introduces the boys in band school symphony concert style. For Rosolino, he intoned, "This fellow who has few if any moody moments..."

Frank was just plain funny. His first big profile in *Downbeat* was simply titled "Funny Frank." Not "Funny Frank Rosolino" -- just "Funny Frank." Everyone knew which Frank they meant. And it wasn't Sinatra.

In the early '60s, the L.A. jazz scene imploded. Between television and the growing popularity of rock and folk music, clubs either folded like lawn chairs or switched to more youth oriented (i.e., non-jazz) booking policies. The club collapse was accompanied by nose-diving record sales and endemic bankruptcy among the independent jazz labels. Continuous critical sniping also took its toll--many critics never forgave West Coast jazz's dual sins of being too white (in Miles Davis's immortal words, "uptight white faggoty jazz") and originating on the wrong side of the Hudson River. By 1963, most of the musicians who had put West Coast jazz on the map were either dead, in prison, in New York, or toiling anonymously in the Hollywood studios. Most wouldn't record another note of jazz until the mid-'70s.

Rosolino chose the last path, earning his supper through a busy schedule with the studios and television. His most prominent gig during this time was the six years he spent on Steve Allen's "Tonight Show," playing trombone in the band and joining in the occasional comic bit. Still innovative, Allen credited him with originating "The strange, off camera cry 'Whoa-oh' which mysteriously greets talk-show hosts at the beginning of a telecast..."

As the '60s turned into the '70s, his career continued on in this less than stellar fashion. Scuffling for gigs grew harder as he scurried from jazz clinic to European tour to small-label recording session back to the inevitable studio gig in the never ending struggle to make the rent. Personal tragedy intervened. His third wife, the mother of his two small sons, committed suicide by running the car in the garage of their home with the door closed. Friends remember him always teetering on the edge of financial disaster. He sporadically talked about joining his third wife in some sort of utopia for the post-suicidal. And then he'd be back to tormenting some airline stewardess until she practically peed in her pant from sheer laughter.

He wasn't impressed with the directions jazz was moving in the '70s. He told one *Downbeat* interviewer "...I went down to the Lighthouse to hear Weather Report...it was just a bunch of weird electronic sound effects. And they played so loud it practically shattered my bones. I walked out." Nor was he very enthusiastic about the new generation of jazz trombonists: one he criticized for "playing a bunch of nothing"

another, "I could hire a greyhound dog to do that." Although he wasn't being totally old and stodgy--he was experimenting with electronics himself--he plainly wanted to go back down to the Lighthouse and play with Shelly, Howard, Bob and the rest until the end of time.

Yet wisecracks and exquisite trombone solos continued to pour from his lips in equally copious amounts. He played a few well-received solos on some hit Quincy Jones albums that had all the young Turk musicians asking "Who's this Frank Rosolino guy?" In the rock world, he popped up on Tower of Power's classic "Back to Oakland" album. He was still in fine form at a 1978 club gig, making exquisitely painful puns and playing songs like "that old standard called 'Flesh and Bones--never heard of it, huh?--OK, 'Body and Soul'" for the minute, albeit re-emerging Los Angeles jazz audience. He hadn't lost his touch with the slide, either. A *Downbeat* reviewer raved about a live performance "...Rosolino must have played the four tunes in his opening set ...at least a thousand times. He made them sound as fresh and vibrant as new love at first sight...Five stars all around." Things seemed to be looking up.

On Saturday night, November 25 1978, his fiancee Diane Armesto wanted to go see trombonist Bill Watrous at Donte's, a North Hollywood jazz club. Rosolino begged off; he preferred to spend some time with his sons. She went to the show with an out-of-town friend, leaving the three Rosolinos to their own devices.

Precisely how they spent the evening will never be known. Did the senior Rosolino make a final joke? Did he whip out the trombone to play one last song? Did he sing "Lemon Drop?" Or did they just watch TV? Three things are definite that evening. Rosolino didn't drink. He didn't take any drugs. And he did write a note. Its contents were never publicized.

Around 4 AM, the man who had who had once recorded a song called "The Most Happy Fella" took out his gun and went into his sons' bedroom. The two boys, aged 9 and 7, were fast asleep in their bunk bed. Carefully and quickly--they probably never knew what was happening--he shot each one once in the head. He then walked back out into the living room and turned the gun on himself. When his fiancee came home a little while later, she found the him lying in the middle of the room, dying from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. His older son was already dead. The younger boy, although seriously injured, would live. However, the bullet had severed his optic nerve and left him blind for life.

Friends, family and the entire jazz world were shocked and appalled. But, as pianist Roger Kellaway said, "When somebody cracks four jokes a minute, we all should have known there was something wrong."

Rather than go disc by disc through the extensive Frank Rosolino discography, I'll boil it down to two CDs. For an introduction to Frank's trombone playing, you need go no further than the Lighthouse Allstars' **LIGHTHOUSE AT LAGUNA (Original Jazz Classics/ Contemporary).** Not only does Frank contribute an excellent solo on the opening track, "Witch Doctor #2, the CD includes one of the few tunes that Frank wrote, "Linda Jean." With of the rest of the band accompanying quietly, Franks turns the song into a trombone showcase.

For the unique Rosolino humor, try **TURN ME LOOSE! (Collectable Jazz Classics),** one of a handful of CDs showcasing his unique brand of jazz singing. The cover features a

wild-eyed Frank rattling the bars of a cage constructed of trombone slides. A discreet sign in the corner advises "Please don't feed the quartet." After one listen, you will agree that this is an excellent suggestion.

Backed by a piano trio, Frank sings a dozen jazz standards and showtunes, shutting up only long enough for the occasional trombone solo. No one's ever claimed Frank has a great voice; the liner notes describe his "expressive, off-beat vocal talents." His voice would not be out of place at a jazz-oriented all-male Judy Garland revue, if you get my drift. But whatever Frank lacks in the pipes department he makes up for with an almost pathological exuberance. He takes wistful ballads like "Come Rain or Come Shine" and "I Cover the Waterfront" at giddy, toe-tapping tempos. And when he breaks out the flag-wavers, it's time to run for the hills. He's at his most manic on "Pennies From Heaven." Uncharacteristically, he almost croons the first chorus. But the second time through, that inimitable Rosolino musical personality shines through in spades. He literally freaks out. He starts improvising surreal lyrics--"Every time it rains, it rains, matzos and meatballs," segues into bizarre, rubber lipped scatting (or is it babbling?) and ultimately dissolves into yodeling that can only be described as demented. It's not at all hard to picture the session ending with the men in white coats leading a still-scatting Frank away.

Great Rock 'n' Roll Deaths #4: Badfinger

Badfinger hailed from Merseyside. They were signed to Apple and produced by Paul McCartney and George Harrison. Not too surprisingly, they sounded more like you-know-who than Klatuu ever did. With the early '70s consumed with the rock establishment's search for the next Beatles (and their inability to admit it was in fact Led Zeppelin), Badfinger had hits with "Come and Get It," "Day After Day" and "Baby Blue." Leader Peter Ham and guitarist Tom Evans also penned Harry Nilsson's massive melancholy 1972 hit "Without You." But those who live by the Beatles die by the Beatles. They left Apple for Warner Brothers after the break-up, but troubles with the label and their manager culminated with Peter Ham hanging himself in 1975. Proof that no one learns from experience, they reformed in 1978 for five less successful years which ended with Tom Evans dangling from a noose. One can only shudder at the fate of the survivors should they dare the oldies circuit.

Great Pop Death #1: Jeanine Decker (The Singing Nun)

Jeanine Decker, Sister Luc-Gabrielle to her fellow initiates of Belgium's Fichermont Monastery, but "The Singing Nun" to everyone else, had a massive hit with "Dominique" in 1963. It spend four weeks at #1 and made the Sister a brilliant, if brief-lived, pop star. She performed on "The Ed Sullivan Show," and was played by Debbie Reynolds in the 1966 movie "The Singing Nun." By 1967, she had left the church for a musical career. Unfortunately, singles like "Glory Be to God For the Golden Pill," (yes, about That Pill) bombed. Shifting gears, she founded a center for autistic children with a woman named Annie Pescher. But alas, there was the matter of taxes on those "Dominique" royalties--she hadn't paid any. The money was naturally long since gone. But, in a refreshingly novel twist of this oh-so-familiar story, she'd blown it, not on riotous living and illicit substances, but on Church donations. Not that it mattered. With the Belgian IRS closing in, Decker and Pescher overdosed on sleeping pills in a suicide pact on March 31, 1985.

Great Rock 'n' Roll Abominations #1: "Rock 'n' Roll Heaven"

I've always maintained that the mid and late '70s were the most abysmal years in rock history. (Punk, especially in this country, was really the '80s happening early). "Frampton Comes Alive" was a massive hit. Bloated prog-rock like Yes and Emerson Lake & Palmer was considered hip and daring. Even worse, compared to the dreck bands like Boston and Bad Company churned out with vast commercial success during those dark years, it was. Polyester clothes, mellow attitudes, and massive marijuana consumption were the order of the day.

But the sickest thing was "Rock 'n' Roll Heaven:" a group of journeymen musicians so desperate for any kind of success that they had themselves surgically altered to resemble five dead rock stars. Some of them had at least a minimum of aesthetic sense. The group featured a Jim Morrison and two Elvis's, one male and one female. (Admittedly, both "Elvis's" looked more like Sha Na Na refugees.) But the true horror was in the two remaining members: "Janis Joplin" and "Jim Croce." The irony of undergoing surgery to look like Janis Joplin is that the real Janis Joplin probably would have done it so she wouldn't. But Jim Croce... the mind boggles. Physically repulsive, guilty of inflicting "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown" on a public that to be perfectly honest, probably deserved it, Croce could have only thrived in an era culturally bankrupt enough to accept an atrocity like "Rock 'n' Roll Heaven."

Yep, you know with a name like that, they had to be a hell of a band.

Great Rock 'n' Roll Deaths #5 :Jackie Wilson

Jackie Wilson is among the all-time great soul singers, one of the few who can be mentioned in the same breath with James Brown. His amazing string of '50s and '60s hits like "Lonely Teardrops" and "(Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher and Higher" are good bets to survive into the next century. Not even being shot by an obsessed female fan in 1961 stopped him; he came back stronger than ever. Even after the hits stopped, he remained a kinetic performer in high demand on the oldies circuit until his sensational end.

On September 25, 1975, while performing in Cherry Hill, New Jersey on a Dick Clark oldies tour, he suffered a heart attack and stroke and collapsed to the stage. He never regained consciousness, dying in a nursing home eight years later. A sadly unverified story (which, admittedly sounds way to be good to be true) had him stricken during his stop-break in "Lonely Teardrops," as he clutched his chest and sang, "My heart is crying, crying."

Great Rock 'n' Roll Abominations #2: Jackie Who?

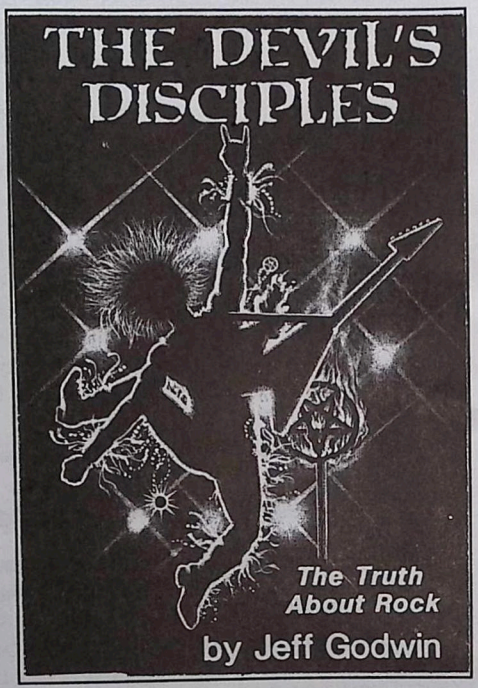
Several years ago, long-time *San Francisco Chronicle* rock critic Joel Selvin made the jump into books with a well-received biography of the terminally under-rated Ricky Nelson. One of his subsequent projects, a full scale biography of Jackie Wilson, promised to be another winner. The editors were enthusiastic. Selvin remembers, "That was one of the best pitch meetings I ever attended. My agent thought we were getting a contract that afternoon." But alas, the devil was in the details. Upon checking, the enthusiastic editorial staff discovered no one in the sales department had ever *heard* of Jackie Wilson. The contract was spindled and the Jackie Wilson story remains untold.

ROCK 'N' ROLL WILL STEAL YOUR SOUL

The Anti-Rock 'n' Roll Book 1966-1988

One of rock's most charming yet seldom acknowledged attributes is its ability to bring foam to the mouth of a certain breed of Christian. Over the past 50 years, an endless parade of ecclesiastic critics have blamed rock music for everything from water fluoridation to the moral degeneration of American youth, all with no discernible affect on record sales. Their only success has been the production of some truly great crackpot literature.

The unquestioned king, at least aesthetically, of this little sub-genre is Jeff Godwin. In his crusade against the evil backbeat, Godwin neither asks nor takes any quarter. His crude, yet utterly heartfelt and sincere rants and raves make his fellow anti-rock writers seem calm and reasoned in comparison. You can easily picture him frothing at the mouth as he penned such classics as *The Devil's Disciples* (1985) and *Dancing With Demons* (1988). He's the lunatic fringe of the anti-rock movement, and probably proud of it. From his perspective, all other anti-rock writers are closet Slayer fans, if not secret Satan worshippers themselves. Fans of fundamentalist fanaticism should find it no surprise that his publisher is comic-book tract maven Jack Chick.



Godwin admits he once was a serious rock fan and musician, even surviving The Who's 1979 "stampede" show in Cincinnati. But that was before he discovered Jesus Christ. Now, he lives by such dictums as: "Why should we fear God? *Because he has the power to utterly destroy us, and that is all we deserve!!"* One can only assume this phase of his life ended in one hell of a bonfire.

The root of the rock threat, Godwin writes, is that beat: an evil, pulsing primitive rhythm throbbing in sync with the human heart that hypnotizes and brainwashes listeners into accepting the music's sinister message. Rock lyrics encourage the use of "mind decaying, death-dealing drugs," frequently couched in slang only teens understand. They promote not just promiscuous sex, but abnormal sex as epitomized by David Bowie, the "limp wristed king of the abnormal world of Homo Rock." Godwin claims screamed rock vocals are inspired by "homosexual penetration of the male" and whip crack drum beats are the first step on the path that leads directly to steamy homosexual S & M.

And who's behind all this? SATAN! To Godwin, Satan isn't just alive and well and living on planet earth, he's as real as your (or more likely, his) next-door neighbor. He sees Satan's hand everywhere in the rock scene: in lyrics, on album covers, at concerts, and even literally in the groups themselves. For Godwin's Satan is not just a behind-the-scenes puppeteer working through intermediaries; no siree Bob. Satan, or at least his infernal minions, are down with it. Godwin writes, "The Lord has also revealed to some Christians that incarnate

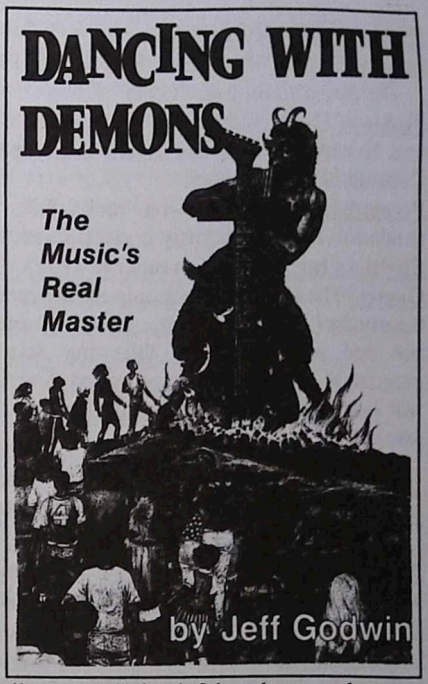
demons from the netherworld actually are members of some of the most popular bands..." Unfortunately, Godwin shows uncharacteristic restraint at this point and leaves the bands and their demonic members unnamed. (Bet they play drums!)

Satan's most insidious weapon is "backwards masking." Certain rock vocal tracks when played backwards reveal hidden EVIL messages.* A properly primed listener can make out "Here's to my sweet Satan" in Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven and "Decide to smoke marijuana" in Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust." And if you believe in the power of subliminal messages, it's just a hop, skip, and a jump to acknowledging the obvious threat of *backwards* subliminal messages.

These sinister reversed messages, Godwin explains, come from rock stars' unfortunate habit of invoking (literally!) demons at recording sessions to ensure hit records. The imps leave back masked messages as their calling cards. He warns, "I believe that even now Satan and his demons are blaspheming and insulting God and the Lamb with their horrible rock record covers and backmasked broadcasts from Hell."

The demons' work doesn't end with the recording session. Merely playing a rock record can summon them fully prepared to claim the nearest available adolescent soul. After all, as Godwin points out, "addiction to rock 'n' roll is a form of demonic possession.".

Godwin isn't just talking about pentacle-encrusted heavy metal bands; he sees Satan lurking behind the bright tempo of the most innocent bubblegum pop ditty. "Virtually nothing in popular music today is worth your support... *No one* makes it big in secular music without selling out to Satan," he thunders as he lambasts Hall & Oates for their "homosexuality and Satanism." Even "We Are the World's" message of "Love is



all we need" is sinful and wrong because "Jesus Christ is what this world needs!"

The Christian rock other anti-rock writers praise isn't Christian enough for Godwin. He thinks most "Christian" artists are at best unwitting dupes if not secret Satanists. He singles out '80s scripture-and-spandex act Stryper as especially wicked, evidenced by their satanic "777" symbol and "To Hell With The Devil" album. Godwin believes this really means "To Hell *With* the Devil," the fate awaiting all Stryper fans. Only gospel and hymns are truly safe.

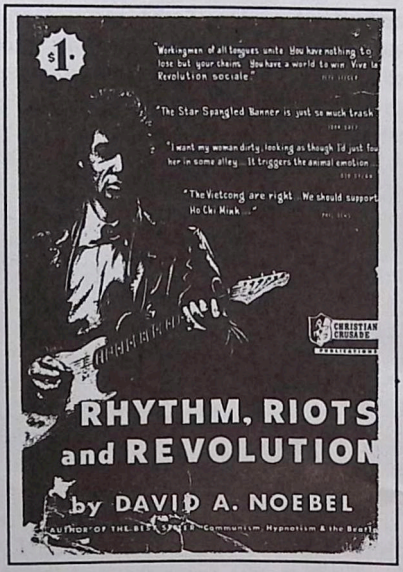
His advice to parents? "The purpose of rock music is to split, splinter, and destroy your home." He urges them to *immediately* burn everything relating to rock in their homes --records, tapes, books, clothes, posters, even jewelry--and double their daily prayer time. Only through these extreme measures can a home be secured from demons during the last days. To Godwin, the stench of blazing plastic and burning cardboard isn't a foul odor, but the smell of salvation.

---

* These are not tracks reversed for sonic affect, but perfectly normal vocals that sorta sound like they're saying something else when played backwards.

MORE ANTI-ROCK BOOKS

REV. DAVID NOEBEL


$1.
"Workingmen of all tongues unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to win. Vive la Revolution sociale."
"The Star Spangled Banner is just so much trash."
"I want my woman dirty, looking as though I'd just found her in some alley... It triggers the animal emotion."
"The Vietcong are right. We should support Ho Chi Minh..."
CHRISTIAN CRUSADE
RHYTHM, RIOTS and REVOLUTION
by DAVID A. NOEBEL
AUTHOR OF THE BIBLE, SPEAKS, Communism, Hypnotism & the Beatles

Books: *Rhythm, Riots, and Revolution* (1966); *The Marxist Minstrels* (1973)
Problem: The primitive, yet scientific rock 'n' roll beat hypnotizes teens and leaves them ripe for Communist brainwashing!
Perpetrators: Commies--the rock, folk, and children's (!!) music industry is *riddled* with 'em.
Christian Rock: Christian rock? In 1966?
Quote: "The Beatles... need only mass hypnotize thousand of American youth... and give word for riot and revolt... If the following scientific program is not exposed, degenerated Americans will indeed raise the communist flag over their own nation"

BOB LARSON (pre-1980)

Books: *Rock & Roll: The Devil's Diversion* (1967, 1970); *Rock & the Church* (1971)
Problem: Hypnotized by the beat, teens are helpless to resist rock's Message of Immorality.
Perpetrator: Satan, of course.
Christian Rock: Blasphemy! "...the beat of rock is a force accommodating demonic possession... not worthy as a vehicle to communicate the gospel."
Quote: "Lyrics of today's rock songs are a large part of the tidal wave of promiscuity, illegitimate births, and political upheaval that have swept our country."

BOB LARSON (post 1980)

Books: *Rock* (1980, 1982); *Larson's Book of Rock* (1987)
Problem: Rock causes immorality, drug addiction, promiscuity, suicide, and homosexuality.
Perpetrators: Secular humanists (Satan's unwitting dupes.)
Christian Rock: Crank those Stryper albums and make a joyous noise unto the Lord!
Quote: "A Christian teenager shouldn't want to attend an Ozzy Osbourne concert and Christian parents shouldn't permit it."

DAN & STEVE PETERS

Books: Far too many, including *Hit Rock's Bottom* (1984, 1986); *Why Knock Rock?* (1984)
Problem: Rock music causes teen suicide and all that other nasty stuff.
Perpetrators: The usual unsaved suspects, doubtlessly influenced by Satan.
Christian Rock: To Hell With the Devil--Rock On!
Quote: "Many of the stars of LIVE AID got there by helping destroy the moral fiber of America's youth."

JACOB ARANZA

Backward Masking Unmasked (1983); *More... Backward Masking Unmasked* (1985)
Problem: A sinister four step plan using rock music to corrupt youth and lead them into accepting Satan as their savior. Projected completion date: late 1980s. (Whoops!)
Perpetrator: You know who.
Christian Rock: OK, but beware! Some Christian rockers listen to more satanic sub-genres.
Quote: "As long as these rock stars are looked upon as the messiahs of our age there will be those who live through their tunes, only to wind up in tombs."

READ HARD OR DIE

DEEP IN A DREAM: The Long Night of Chet Baker by James Gavin (Knopf 2002)

Chet Baker was the great white hope of '50s jazz, a cool lyrical trumpet player whose wistful vocals and James Dean look endeared him to the masses as much as they enraged critics. He was also, as Gavin makes clear in this deliciously detailed biography, one of the biggest assholes who ever lived. He was a thieving junkie who made a career of ratting on friends, abusing women, and fucking over just about everyone else. He was even lousy in bed! Much as he loves his trumpet work, Gavin literally does not say a single kind word about Baker the man. A wonderfully sordid biography.

"Rock Death in the '70s: A Sweepstakes" by Greil Marcus (article c. 1979)

While Mr. Marcus usually makes me think there's a lot to be said for illiterate rock critics, this article is a hoot. After abusing the '70s cult of "survivors," Marcus proceeds rate rock's non-survivors of the decade, based on past contributions, potential future contributions, and manner of death. It's a hilarious idea executed with plenty of droll humor. Although the scores don't meet the tests of taste or time--certainly Keith Moon's future potential exceeded Lynryd Skynrd en toto--it's well worth tracking down.

THE DEATH OF ROCK 'N' ROLL by James Pike (Faber & Faber 1974)

Most books devoted to rock 'n' roll deaths are dull efforts by cheap rock-crit hacks whining about Jim, Janis, and Jimi. All have been effectively supplanted by this nifty item. The three J's are here, but so are hundreds of other deaths in rock and affiliated genres described wittily and thoroughly, as well as some thoughtful writing on rock's obsession with death and its own demise. Pike carefully explains the musical importance of his subjects without stinting on the gory details or the morbid humor. How can you not love a book with a chapter on Mersey beat bands entitled "Beatles Bugouts?"

JAZZ AND DEATH by Frederick Spencer, M.D. (Univ. Press of Miss, 2002)

This is my kind of book: unabashedly morbid, obsessively researched, and technically accurate. Spencer's a retired med school prof and (one hopes) a serious jazz fan who applies his day job skills to analyzing the end of his favorite musicians. Written in a delicious doctor speak ("This summary of an alcohol-marijuana induced schizoid state is colorfully accurate"), he debunks legends and settles controversies without being shy about leaving some cases unsolved. I can't imagine anyone who likes jazz and this zine living without this book.

ROCK & ROLL: PROCEED WITH CAUTION by J. Brent Bill (1984)
ROCK RECONSIDERED (apa ROCK OF THIS AGE) by Steve Lawhead (1981)

The anti-rock fad of the '70s and '80s was embarrassing enough to see members of milder denominations writing anti-anti-rock books. Although obviously concerned about some rock music, both Lawhead and Bill take far more reasoned approaches. Bill debunks rock's sinister "power" by pointing out, "This sort of scrambled thinking shifts moral responsibility from a living, breathing person to an inanimate hunk of plastic" while Lawhead says, "Burning piles of records in church parking lots will not reverse the trend." They're handy items of have around if you ever have to do a quick deprogramming.

MUSICAL MAYHEM

Music doesn't just soothe the soul; it inspires homicidal and suicidal frenzy among its performers and mass hysteria out in the audience. Who knew the record store could be such a morbid place?

The Spade Cooley Stomp 4

Let me put all hyperbole aside for once. The saga of Western Swing musician Spade Cooley is the sickest, most bizarre tale of musical mayhem I have ever run across. To paraphrase the DA at the trial: it's one thing to stomp your wife to death...it's another thing entirely to do it in front of your 14-year old daughter. And even worse was what she didn't see.

Dying For David Cassidy! 26

In 1973, the world was filled with pubescent girls who would cheerfully do just that. Well, one of them got the opportunity--but she didn't die with a smile on her face...

Hanging Around With The Band 32

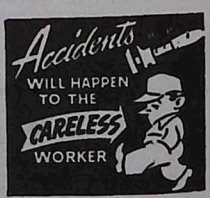
A cautionary tale for all musicians seeking to reclaim their former glory. Some of the best reunion tours are those left untaken.

Frank Rosolino Was a Funny Guy 38

The clown prince of mid century jazz, Rosolino was as beloved for his wacky hi-jinx and non-stop clowning as he was for his brilliant trombone work. Until the day the laughter stopped.

Rock 'n' Roll Will Steal Your Soul 44

An appreciation of Jeff Godwin, the literary rabid dog of the Christian anti-rock 'n' roll movement. Plus: a quick look at some of his lesser competitors. You will never dare play your Led Zeppelin records backwards again.

Read Hard or Die 47

A few music books that somehow manage to avoid hagiography.